



# The Garden Gate Newsletter

February-March 2011

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**Joanie Brobst**

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Special Events

**John Simmonds & Judy Burton**

Websites

[www.co.henrico.va.us/agent](http://www.co.henrico.va.us/agent)

[www.henricomga.org](http://www.henricomga.org)

## Association Meetings

### Invasive Plants

**February 9, 1-3pm**

**Adam Downing & Neil Clark**

Natural Resources Regional Extension Agents, Adam Downing and Neil Clark will speak about invasive species in the Commonwealth.

### Using Native Plants to Create a Butterfly Garden

**March 9, 1-3pm**

**Denise Green**



Denise Greene, landscape designer and owner of Sassafras Farm native plant nursery in Hayes, Virginia will speak about using native plant species in creating a butterfly garden.

**Please pick up your recertification packet in the office if you have not yet received it.**

## March 2 Board Meeting Note:

The March Board Meeting time has been moved to 11:30am so as not to conflict with advanced training at 1:00pm.

# President's Message

Greetings to all!

Can you believe it's already 2011? It seems like it was just, well, you know what I mean...

I'm delighted that another year's training classes have begun, and that I can join with friends to mentor & to learn.

Winter is here, but I'm preparing full-throttle for the upcoming season with great enthusiasm.

Sometimes gardening can be a solitary endeavor – a great way to recharge your batteries – and that's just fine.

However, I've really come to embrace how much better I enjoy gardening when shared with others.

Let me give you a couple of recent examples:

It's not uncommon for me to share with anyone within earshot that I'm not particularly fond of winter.

After an association meeting last fall (November?), Mary E. and I happened to be leaving the Extension office together. I was going on about how I didn't care for cold weather & short days, and was regaling her with the idea that soon after the holidays, I'm ready for spring!

"Oh, I don't know", she said, "I think it makes for wonderful bulbs in the spring".

Of course, Mary E. is absolutely correct!!!

And hearing another perspective was just what I needed. Her words are sustaining me as these short days begin to grow longer & longer.

Ann Dutton e-mailed to tell me about the mentor/mentee luncheon, and what a wonderful activity it had been for so many of you.

She went on to comment about how much all of us had enjoyed the bus trip in October. (Thanks Flo, for all your great work!)

Ann noted that the bus trip seems to be becoming a favorite tradition for the association, just as the June and December meetings have been for many years.

We both agreed that, while all of us have a variety of interests and activities, it's when we come together & enjoy our group traditions that we're SO strong!

Coming together around the shared interest in gardening and education, that's what we do.

As I look forward at 2011, I'm really enthusiastic about what's to come, and I hope to build upon our fellowship and traditions.

What association traditions do you hold dear? Are there new ones you'd like to see?

Where shall we go on our next bus trip? How can we strengthen our bonds as a group?

What other ideas might you have?

Will you do me a favor - will you call or e-mail with a thought or two?

Fondly,  
Barry

barryjhayes@comcast.net 314-1998



# A Little Bit about Privet

By Peggy Lowry

Privet, a shrub we take for granted, has been used for centuries in a variety of ways. It was probably first used to decorate the gardens of the Pharaohs and the gardens of ancient Persia where horticulture was considered a royal occupation. It edged gardens, circled flower beds and was shaped into elaborate topiaries. The Romans clipped it into intricate shapes and did the same with boxwood and cedar. Privet was the most popular because it grew so fast, tolerated severe shearing, was native to the Mediterranean area and was easily cultivated and propagated from cuttings. The Romans carried plants to various parts of their empire including England where privet thrived.

In ancient Briton, the Anglo Saxons used privet berries to dye cloth and the bark to tan leather. The bark was also used to dye fishing nets a bright red because it was thought that red nets caught more fish. The long thin privet branches were used to bind bales of hay and to fasten bags and bundles. The Latin name for privet is *Ligustrum* meaning “a binding.” Monks and magistrates wrote with the black juice from privet berries, and it was still used in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by some country folk. Powder from crushed dry privet leaves was used to treat burns and scaldings, skin sores and ulcers. Liquid from boiled privet berries provided mouthwash. In 1601 it was prescribed that crushed privet blossoms “be laid to the head to swage the pain of headache.”

Early colonials in this country soon realized how much they missed having privet here because they depended on its use in many ways including hedges and garden boundaries. And



so by general demand, privet was the first European shrub brought to the colonies. It is still used today as a primary barrier and to absorb noise – a green fence providing beauty with its glossy leaves and white flowers. Although it is toxic to horses, birds savor the berries, and it is a food plant for the larvae of several species of butterflies. Common privet needs very little care and other than trimming. It will grow in soils and environs where almost nothing else will. A horticulture teacher/friend of mine once remarked that *Ligustrum* was the closest thing to a weed of any shrub he knew

of. Indeed, some privet species can become invasive in areas where they are not native. In New Zealand it is banned from sale or cultivation because of the effect of its pollen on asthma sufferers. Although residents in the Hamptons love their privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*), many people say that privet would “put them off buying a property.” The name Privet is used for all members of the genus *Ligustrum* which includes 40 to 50 species of the shrub, not only native to the Mediterranean area but also Europe, North Africa, Asia and Australia.

In the 20th century, Japanese privet was introduced to the west coast and was called California Privet. It became quite popular and is now one of the most widely grown shrubs in America. Also popular is *Ligustrum ibolium* which is the hardiest privet. Dwarf *L. ibolium* is useful on soil banks and along highways because of its horizontal branches with white tassel like flowers in the spring, and it is tolerant of smog and deep shade.

European privet is found across the United States. Chinese and Japanese privet are found mostly in the Southeast and Midwest. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and the National Parks Service advise us not to plant it. “Privets can invade floodplains, forests, wetlands and fields. Privets form dense thickets, out-competing native vegetation.” It is spread also by birds and wildlife that eat its seeds and excrete them undamaged. Native alternatives include: blackhaw, red or black chokeberry, inkberry and spicebush.

Although *Ligustrums* are invasive and overused, they continue to be popular because of their low cost, availability, rapid growth and adaptability to most habitats.

## From The Smithsonian

“Caterpillars appear to walk in a wavelike motion that starts with their back legs and moves forward. But to the surprise of scientists from Tufts University and elsewhere, the insect gets going when it suddenly thrusts its innards forward; the rest of its body, 16 legs included, catches up like the end of a slinky. The scientists learned this from x-rays of hawk moth caterpillars in action. They suggest that a similar mechanism – gut sliding, they call it – propels other caterpillars.

It’s ‘unlike any form of legged locomotion previously recorded.’”

Peggy Lowry

Welcome!

Welcome to the 2011 class of Master Gardener Trainees!  
We look forward to meeting each one of you.

## Coconut Cupcakes

3 cups flour  
1 tsp. baking powder  
½ tsp. baking soda  
½ tsp. salt  
2 cups sugar  
¾ cup unsalted butter, softened

6 eggs  
1 ½ tsp. almond extract  
1 ½ tsp. vanilla extract  
1 cup buttermilk  
5 ½ cups (14 ozs.) sweetened flaked  
Coconut, divided

### Frosting:

2 pks. (8 oz. ea.) cream cheese, softened  
¾ cup unsalted butter, softened  
1 tsp. vanilla extract

½ tsp. almond extract  
1 ½ lbs. (about 5 ½ cups)  
Confectioners' sugar, sifted

### Cakes:



Combine flour, baking powder, soda and salt. Set aside. On medium speed, beat the sugar and butter until fluffy. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. Beat in the extracts. Beat in flour mixture alternately with the buttermilk beginning and ending with the flour mixture. Beat until just blended. Stir in 2 2/3 cups coconut.

Spoon the batter almost to the top of paper lined muffin cups. Bake at 325° for 25-30 minutes or until golden and a toothpick comes out clean. Cool in pans for 10 minutes; then cool completely on racks. Frost tops and sprinkle with remaining coconut.

### Frosting:

Beat butter, cream cheese and extracts until smooth. Beat in the sugar until well blended.

Peggy Lowry

## Master Gardener Coordinator Endowment 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 **20%** of all seed sales. 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.

There is a link to Botanical Interests on the VMGA website ([www.vmga.net](http://www.vmga.net)) -

[http://www.botanicalinterests.com/store/register\\_affiliate.php?AffiliateId=446](http://www.botanicalinterests.com/store/register_affiliate.php?AffiliateId=446)

Thanks from your Henrico Master Gardeners Association

Beverly Cochrane

# Meeting Date Reminders

## Board Meetings

February 2, 1:00pm

**March 2, 11:30pm (time change)**

## Association Meetings

February 9, 1:00pm

March 9, 1:00pm

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

## **Planning Ahead**

The International Master Gardener Conference will be held in Charleston, West Virginia October 11-14, 2011.