



the *Trumpet Vine*

Knowledge for the Community from the Loudoun County Master Gardeners

Winter 2008 – the Season to Plan

Volume IV, Issue I

www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org

LOUDOUN COUNTY MASTER GARDENER MONTHLY MEETINGS

FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC Meetings are held at the Virginia Tech Extension Office, 30B Catoclin Circle SE, Leesburg at 7pm

JANUARY 3

“Butterflies in the Garden”

Rick Lewandowski, the Director of the Mt. Cuba Center and a native plant explorer, the Mid-Atlantic’s finest woodland wildflower garden and a former du Pont family estate. Rick spent 16 years with the Morris Arboretum, as the Director of Horticulture and Curator of the Living Collection prior to his 8 years at Mt. Cuba. With Mt. Cuba’s focus on plants native to the Appalachian Piedmont Region, he is the perfect kick-off speaker for our year of “Go Native”.

FEBRUARY 7

“Dragonflies”

A favorite from among our 2007 speakers Kevin Monroe returns, this time to enrapture us with dragonflies. He is an educator and naturalist. Currently, Kevin is the Park Manager of Huntley Meadow Park. Previously, he worked as the Program Coordinator and the Staff Naturalist for the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia and is still actively involved in the organization.

Check our website for future meetings

GO NATIVE!

Loudoun County Master Gardeners are spotlighting native plants in 2008. With many programs on “Going Green” in many areas, this is how you as a gardener can make your green thumb even greener.

Native plants are species that occur in the region in which they originally evolved. Plants evolve in response to processes characteristic of the region: the climate, soil, rainfall, drought, frost, and interactions with the other species inhabiting the area. Thus native plants possess certain traits that make them uniquely adapted to local conditions. Native plants often surpass non-natives in ruggedness and resistance to drought, insects, and disease.

Going native begins by planting more native Virginia species, removing invasive plants, reducing pesticide use, conserving water, protecting water quality, and supporting our natural wildlife.

Planting and gardening this way has many benefits and advantages to you and the environment. Because native plants are uniquely adapted to thrive under the conditions of the region, they require little or no fertilizer, watering, or pesticides. Thus, they require less labor and fewer resources – as well as fewer potentially harmful chemicals.



Local garden centers now carry a good selection of starter natives and nurseries specializing in native plants are becoming more prevalent as well.

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Gardening Events

Loudoun County Master Gardener 2008 Class

If you are thinking of joining the ranks of dedicated, happy volunteers, there are a few seats left in the 2008 Master Gardener Training class. Learn about horticulture, dig into the dirt at the Ida Lee Demonstration Garden, and help your friends and neighbors in Loudoun County with their gardening questions. Call the Help Desk or go to our website for an application. Classes begin on February 5, 2008. The table shows the topics covered in the class.

Date	Subject	Date	Subject
Feb 5	Welcome/Overview/Goals	Mar 6	Pruning
Feb 7	Botany	Mar 11	Herbaceous Plants & Bulbs
Feb 12	Soils & Fertilizer	Mar 13	Plant Pathology (diseases)
Feb 14	Basic Entomology	Mar 25	Communications
Feb 19	Propagation	Mar 27	Water Quality
Feb 21	Vegetables	Apr 1	Plant Damage (diagnosis)
Feb 26	Small Fruit & Fruit Trees	Apr 3	Pesticides
Feb 28	Turf	Apr 8	Landscape
Mar 4	Woody Plants		

If you are interested, act now! You can get an application by calling our Help Desk at 703-771-5150, from our website at www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org, or by sending an e-mail to ex107mg@vt.edu.

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, veteran status, national origin, disability, or political affiliation – An equal opportunity / affirmative action employer.

Master Gardeners Win Garden Contest



For the last two years, the Virginia Cooperative Extension commemorated Jamestown's 400th anniversary by hosting the "America's Anniversary Garden" contest. The theme was "Red, White, and Blue."

109 entries came from all over the state. Loudoun County Master Gardeners were excited to win the category of "Farmer's Market Display" for our decorative booth at the 2006 Leesburg Flower and Garden Show. Visit the official AAG website if you would like to see the other winning gardens, www.ext.vt.edu/americiasgarden.

Flowers for the Winter

Make an Outdoor Winter Arrangement

There is no reason the beautiful containers you use all summer need to be bare all winter. All they need are some greens and fun accents for you to have a focal point in your garden urn, on your porch, or at any other special spot in your yard throughout the winter months.

1. Start with any container and get creative! One year I put a wagon on my back porch filled with greens. Make sure you have enough weight to keep your container from blowing over. Also remember water may freeze and break clay or pottery.
2. Cut and fit floral foam (oasis) to the container leaving one inch above the top of container. You can use floral tape and/or chicken wire to secure the foam if necessary. If you are using larger branches they can be anchored directly into gravel or small stones in the container.
3. Next gather greens. You may be surprised with the foliage in your yard! Almost any type of greens will do the job: hemlock, magnolia, cedar, boxwood, holly, Japanese princesses' pine, berried juniper, and noble fir. Don't forget large pinecones, rose hips, winterberry, or fruited branches. As you are choosing what you like hold them up together and it will give you a good idea of what they will look like once placed in container. Put greens in a vase or bucket for 24 to 48 hours so they can soak up as much water as possible.
4. Start your arrangement by adding tall twigs or branches first as they determine the overall height. Next add greens at sides and front, staggering their heights so they are progressively shorter as you work toward the front of the pot. Then add coarse textures with finer foliage last. Check your arrangement for holes and fill-in as needed.



5. Finish with accents. Wooden skewers are great to attach pinecones or fruit: apples, lemons, limes, or pomegranate halves. For more color, add a bow.
6. Your arrangement should last 4-6 weeks. If there is a lack of precipitation, periodically pour water directly on your arrangement. You can also replace sprigs of greenery or fruit.

Relax, have fun, and experiment with new ideas!

Darcy Justen, Master Gardener

Winter Flower Gardening Tips

- Check your mulch for winter protection.
- If you have dead plants in pots, break the root ball into chunks and add to your compost.
- Plan additions or changes while you can see your "bare" beds.
- Give heaving perennials the "February stomp."
- Check stored bulbs, corms, and tubers – discard any that are soft or diseased.

Lawn Care & Landscaping

RAIN! DROUGHT IT!

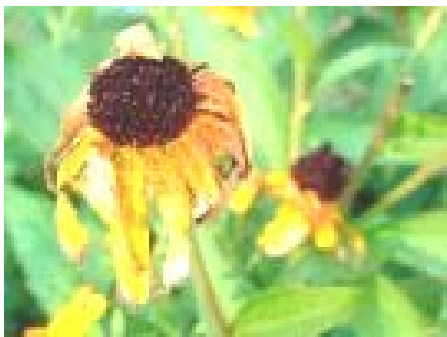
According to our local Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District reps, unless we get 10½" of additional rain through the end of December, this will be the lowest annual rainfall we've had in the county since the 1930s. So, what should you do to prepare for the winter and the future?

What worked in this year of drought?

Treating your lawn correctly and organically keeps it healthy and drought resistant. We sampled, then limed, aerated, seeded, and added organic material last spring with incredible results.

Drip systems work well for large vegetable and flower beds. I had good harvests, in spite of feeding the deer more than their share.

Water sources must be close to all major beds, including the compost pile. For this, I highly recommend rain barrels. My husband and I made four in two hours during a recent county workshop and are strategically locating them close to all our major water consumption spots.



To prep for winter, consider:

- **A final deep root watering of trees and shrubs, particularly transplants of 1-3 years, is recommended.** Fall seasonal winds whisk dew and what little moisture is available away from our plants. Remember that trees may not manifest stress for years; so watering now can save you heartbreak for the next **FIVE** years!
- **Continue normal daily activity, but don't do seasonal work until the rain returns.** Don't fertilize, prune, or apply pest controls while the drought continues. Don't cultivate the soil as it increases moisture loss.
- **Retest your soil now for the spring.** One impact of drought is reduced fertilizer absorption by your plants. Because plant metabolism slows during drought, the potassium and phosphorus you added this season may still be present in the soil. That means you can burn your plants next year if you assume you need to supplement as usual. Now is the time to collect new samples and get an updated Soil Test from Virginia Tech.
- **Rest with your garden!** If it's any consolation, "The 2008 Farmer's Almanac" predicts a wetter-than-average spring and summer and a dry fall for our area. Next year may bring a **NEW** set of challenges. In the meantime, enjoy the down time to dream and plan. There's a moist season in your near future!

Dawn Meyerriecks, Master Gardener

Winter Lawn Care Tips

- Avoid walking on frozen lawns to prevent winter damage.
- Remove debris, aerate and / or dethatch when soil is dry enough.

Trees and Shrubs

Recycling your Christmas tree

Your Christmas tree really doesn't have to end up on the curb or in the garbage. There are some very creative ideas of how it would like to spend its final days.

Christmas tree disposal doesn't have to be a major problem. There are several environmentally friendly alternatives. Not only are these methods safe for the environment but they provide a source of enjoyment for you and your friends and family. You can move your tree outside in a secure spot and use it as a large bird feeder. Let the kids keep it decorated. You can enjoy watching the birds and animals that come to visit.

After spending the winter out in the garden, the tree needs to be disposed of when spring approaches. One way to dispose of the tree is to put it in the chipper and turn it into

useable mulch. This chipped material can be used in the landscape to act as a cover over the soil around trees, shrubs, and flowers. It helps to return nutrients to the soil as it breaks down. You can also remove the branches and lay them over existing beds.

For those living in rural areas, finding a second use for a Christmas tree is a bit easier. Christmas trees make excellent material to build brush piles for wildlife. These piles provide cover for small animals and birds. The animals use the piles to hide from predators, as safe resting places and to raise their young. It is always best to have a base first of large material such as large rocks, logs, or tree stumps. This provides a place for small animals to access the interior of the pile. Then pile on the Christmas tree.

Christmas trees can have a life after we're done using them indoors. They did start their journey outdoors perhaps they should end it that way!

Darcy Justen, Master Gardener

Fun Facts on Christmas Trees

- Christmas trees are grown in all 50 states.
- Almost all trees require shearing to attain the Christmas tree shape. At six to seven feet, trees are ready for harvest. It takes six to ten years to get a mature tree.
- Christmas trees remove dust and pollen from the air.
- In 1856 Franklin Pierce, the 14th President of the United States, was the first President to place a Christmas tree in the White House.
- 73 million new Christmas trees are going to be planted this year.
- On average, over 2,000 Christmas trees are planted per acre.
- Thomas Edison's assistant, Edward Johnson, came up with the idea of electric lights for Christmas trees in 1882.

Winter Trees and Shrubs Tips

- Gently brush snow from trees and shrubs to prevent damage.
- De-icing salt is harmful, use sand or bird seed to protect your trees and shrubs.
- Prune deciduous trees (oaks, maple, and birch) and fruit trees before growth starts.
- Prune evergreen hedges, shrubs, and trees before growth starts.
- Check for overwintering insects and diseases; apply dormant oil if needed.

Pest Management



Gypsy Moth - caterpillar & adult

A major upsurge of gypsy moth activity is expected in Loudoun County next spring. Last year, the moths defoliated significant areas and observers are reporting enough of their egg masses to indicate the situation may be worse in 2008.

In the next few months, Corey Childs, Loudoun County Extension Agent, and other Loudoun officials are going to provide background information to local and regional media. Look for updates!

Jim Kelly, Master Gardener

Vegetable Gardening

Planning Your Vegetable Garden

Start by answering a few, basic questions:

- How much time can you devote to your garden on a regular basis?
- What vegetables do you like and what are you going to do with the produce? Other than eating fresh vegetables, are you going to can, freeze, or dry some of your harvest?
- How much space is available?

The answers to these questions tell you how large (or small) a garden you should plan.

- Plan your garden on paper first.
- If you're going to order seeds, do so by January, February at the latest.
- Rotate your vegetables so that you do not plant crops from the same family in the same space more than once every three years.

Condensed from 'Planning the Vegetable Garden,' VA Tech Pub #426-312

Vegetable Gardening Tips for Winter

- Plot your garden on paper and remember to rotate crops.
- Order seeds in January or February.
- Cutback raspberries in February.
- As soon as ground thaws and is dry enough, start tilling or turning beds. Add compost, balanced fertilizer, or manure.
- Check for any over-wintering diseases or pests and remove.

Garden Buddies**Gardening for Kids****Children's' Garden News**

The children's garden at Ida Lee Park in Leesburg is all ready for winter. We packed up all the birdhouses, toys, and fairies until spring. We have many new and exciting features that we are adding for next year! Don't forget to tell your moms and teachers we will be doing talks and tours in the Spring!

**Feeding The Birds**

Some birds fly south for the winter. We call this migration. They go to a warmer place to find food. Other birds stay here all winter. Many need extra help in finding food. Here is a fun project you can do to help feed and observe them.

What you need:

- Some or all: popcorn, peanuts in shells, apples, cranberries, pears, oranges, kiwi, peanut butter, suet or lard (animal fat from grocery store)
- String, needle and strong thread, scissors, knife
- Pine cones (to use with peanut butter)
- Onion or orange bag (to use with suet)

What to do:

- String the popcorn and cranberries on a long, doubled piece of thread. String the whole peanuts on another thread.
- Slice the fruit crosswise, about ¼-½" thick. Poke a hole about 2/3 of the way across each slice, thread a 12" piece of string through it and tie the ends together.
- Put peanut butter or suet into the holes of a pinecone. Put birdseed in a storage bag and roll pinecone in seed and hang with a string. These pinecones can also act as ornaments for an outdoor tree.
- Cut suet into large pieces and put it into an onion bag.

Hang the food from trees and bushes in sheltered areas, where you can see it. But remember birds like to eat where they feel safe. Be patient. It takes time for birds and animals to find the food. Try different locations. And once you start feeding the birds regularly, try to do it throughout the winter. They start to depend on you and may have trouble finding other sources of food later in the winter.

Winter Gardening Tips

Help Desk Answers Your Questions

The Help Desk is staffed Monday through Friday from 9am to 12 noon, when county offices are open. Call us at 703-771-5150 with your questions. This is one of the frequently asked questions during the winter.

Q: When should I prune my boxwood? Is it OK to shear them with hedge trimmers to keep them in shape?

A: The best time to prune is when the plant is dormant in late winter or very early spring. At this time of year, you can observe which branches died through the winter and the upcoming new growth quickly hides the pruning cuts. Light pruning in early winter is also acceptable. It is a good source for greens for holiday decorating. You can see boxwoods grace the front gardens of plantations for the last 100 years. Proper pruning helps your boxwood maintain their good looks and health for years to come.

How to Prune – Shearing vs. Pruning: Shearing is the uniform removal of all or part of the latest flush of plant growth to increase the compactness or to maintain the shape or size of the plant. Shearing causes the plant to send out lots of new shoots below each cut which creates a thick outer shell of foliage and dense shade for the interior branches. While this practice may be OK during the first few years after planting while the boxwood's shape is being developed, continued shearing leads to foliage drop on the inner branches and creates conditions that support the development of fungal diseases that can kill the plant.

Pruning is the selective removal of branches or plant parts. Pruning of boxwood should be done to remove any branches that have been killed during the winter, to open the canopy to allow light and air into the center of the shrub (thinning), and to retain the shape and size of the shrub. To thin boxwood, use sharp bypass hand-pruners to snip individual branches back to a reasonable length. Remove six to eight inches of the branch, cutting just above a node (or bud). Continue pruning around the shrub until you remove about ten percent of the outer branches. This leaves a shrub that has retained its overall shape but now has small openings in the outer surface that show the inner leaves. If you any other questions about your boxwoods please contact the helpdesk at 703-771-5150.



Debbie Dillion is the Urban Horticulturist and coordinator of the Master Gardener Volunteer program in Loudoun County. She can be reached at 703-771-5838.

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