



Portsmouth Master Gardeners Association Newsletter-January 2024

Note from the President

Happy New Year PMGA!

I'm looking forward to working with all of you in 2024 to further the goals of horticultural education in Portsmouth (appropriately lofty!)

I want to take this opportunity to tell you that I've asked J.C. Gardner to accept the position of PMGA Vice President to fill my unexpired term (1 year). He has accepted the post! And, as all who know him, he's a Worker!

Being a volunteer is an interesting and challenging work ethic. I'm so impressed by how much all of you have given to all the projects and activities PMGA is involved in. Thank you for your dedication and service. I hope 2024 will be a banner year.

PMGA President- Glenda Richard

Library Talk-Holiday Spices & Holiday Plants



(photo submitted by Nancy Perkins)

Officers

President- Glenda Richard
V. President- JC Gardner
Treasurer- Lu Anne Copeland
Secretary- Michelle Ryan
Past President- Barbara Byers
Cor. Secretary- Nancy Perkins

Standing Committees

Communications- Ellen Bible
Education- Louise Roesser
Horticulture- Kathleen Duke

Ed Officio Advisor
VCE Horticulture Agent- Cyndi Wyskiewicz

Upcoming Events

Garden Talks-
6:30-7:30pm at Churchland Library
Jan. 17-Holiday Cacti
Feb. 21-Pruning Basics
Mar. 20-Starting Plants from Seed & Seed Swap

Mar. 9- Workshop: Build a Bluebird House-10am

TREE STEWARD ASPIRATION by J.C. Gardner

Last June 2023, when I was cutting my grass, my wife came outside into the yard and said to me, “The grass looks really good, but what are you going to do about those dead limbs in the top of those Crepe Myrtle trees?” Responding, I told her that I was going to prune the crepe myrtle trees in the fall when the leaves start to fall off the trees. The following month, Cyndi Wyskiewicz, our Portsmouth Master Gardener Association, Ed Officio Advisor VCE Horticulture Agent, informed us that a Tree Steward Course was going to be offered in the fall 2023.

In retrospect, my desire to pursue tree stewardship was dual-focused as I not only wanted to gain the insight to improve my care of our trees, I wanted to enhance my ability to support the community. Specifically, I had previously received several tree-care inquiries while managing the Master Gardener Helpline, but I was clueless as to where to start—a feeling of helplessness that was very uncomfortable for me, so much so, that I found myself consulting Cyndi for help. My tree-care knowledge deficit compelled me to seek help.

Subsequent to successfully completing the Tree Steward Course, I developed a sense of pride in caring for our trees and advising others on the care of their trees. In fact, I am now capable of determining how to plant the right tree in the right place, measure the canopy and height of trees, properly prune trees, and much more. The tree steward course is open to fully accredited Extension Master Gardeners, and in Hampton Roads, it’s only offered every five years. I completed the course with two of my Master Gardener peers—Paul Mundin, and Ben Dukes. As part of the course, we are required to complete a tree steward project. Our project is to develop tree identification signs for placement near the trees at Hoffler Creek Wildlife Preserve, which encompasses the almost one-mile Ballard Trail. Being a Tree Steward is such a rewarding feeling!!!





Test Your Horticulture Knowledge

Answer the 10 following questions (answers are at the bottom but don't cheat!) and see how you rank.

1. Which of the following name is used first when writing a plant's scientific name?
 - a. species
 - b. genus
 - c. variety
 - d. cultivar

2. Gymnosperms are made up of what primarily species of the temperate zone?
 - a. dicots
 - b. monocots
 - c. broadleaf herbs
 - d. evergreens

3. A plant with characteristics that is only found in the wild is known is a:
 - a. cultivar
 - b. form
 - c. hybrid
 - d. species

4. Which plant structure conducts water and minerals to the leaves?
 - a. xylem
 - b. cambium
 - c. phloem
 - d. meristem

5. Name the distinct part of the plant where leaves are attached to the stem.
 - a. internode
 - b. crown
 - c. spur
 - d. node

6. A horizontal stem that is fleshy or semi-woody and lies along the ground is called a:
- rhizome
 - stolon
 - crown
 - tuber
7. Crocus are propagated by planting a:
- bulb
 - corm
 - tuber
 - tuberous root
8. Trees are perennial woody plants, usually with one main trunk, and usually more than _____ feet tall at maturity.
- 12
 - 20
 - 25
 - 30
9. Plants that complete their life cycle in two growing seasons are called:
- perennials
 - annuals
 - tender
 - biennial
10. The stalk that supports the leaf blade is called the _____.
- petiole
 - midrib
 - cuticle
 - sheath

Answers- 1- b; 2-d; 3-d; 4-a; 5-d; 6-b; 7-b; 8-a; 9-d; 10-a
0-2 correct-needs improving; 3-4 correct-improving; 5-6 correct- getting better; 7-8 correct- most improved; 9-10 correct- Super Master Gardener!



Location. Location, Location! submitted by Diana Davenport

We have often heard how important location is in real estate. It is no less important when you are planting your garden. Begin with the guiding principal of planting the right plants in the right place.

The United States Department of Agriculture has established thirteen different Plant Hardiness Zones with temperatures ranging from a minus 60 degrees Fahrenheit in zone 1 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit in zone 13. Each of those zones represents a variation of ten degrees.

With climate change the rising temperatures have shifted half of the states into warmer zones and increased the stress on their crops. In response the USDA has updated the plant hardiness map. Planting crops and landscaping gardens in accordance with the updated Plant Hardiness Zones changes the way everyone plants. Farmers and gardeners will no longer be able to plant as they have done for decades, but will now have to explore raising plants that are new to their zone, contend with longer growing seasons, invasive seeds germinating earlier and an increase in the types and numbers of insects.

When you are stocking up on all of those bright colored seed packets for spring planting, begin by selecting perennials because they come back each year, establishing the structure of your garden and saving you money. To be sure you are selecting the best plants for your zone check the information on the back of the seed envelope. Knowing your zone will help you select the right plants and becoming familiar with the date for the last frost in the spring and the first frost in the fall will allow you to know the length of your growing season.

Want to find out if your zone has change? It is available at <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>



Garden Tools...We All Have a Favorite! By Kathy Rivenbark

Do you have a favorite garden tool? You know the one. You grab it first when you step out into the yard. You use it in multiple and creative ways. If it gets lost in the yard, you can't go on until you find it. If it is permanently lost (Heaven forbid!) you call your family and tell them that you know what you want for your birthday! Sound familiar? My *go-to* garden tool is a stainless-steel garden knife. (See the picture.) It is sharp and I use it for everything from planting bulbs (it has measurements on the front of the blade) to cutting open bags of mulch or garden soil. It comes in handy for planting rows of carrot and radish seeds, and it is perfect for digging out stubborn weeds. The bright yellow handle makes it easy to find, and it came with a holster for safe storage. I purchased mine at Brent and Becky's in their garden shop after Brent showed us how to use it to plant a lot of bulbs quickly. I am sure that you can find one just about anywhere!

Now, it's your turn. The Education Committee would like to invite you to share your favorite garden tool. It might be anything from garden gloves to your great-grandmother's shovel. Contact Louise Roesser about writing a short article about your favorite garden tool for our future newsletters. Don't forget to include a picture!



Identifying Holiday Cacti by Schonna Dungan

Did you receive or purchase a “Christmas” Cactus this year? Chances are what you have is not a Christmas Cactus but a Thanksgiving Cactus. What’s the difference? Glad you asked! This topic will be featured in our January Library Lecture on the 17th.

The Thanksgiving Cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*), also called Crab Cactus, is closely related to the Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera x buckleyi*) but they are not the same and require slightly different care. And not to muddy the water further there is also an Easter Cactus (*Hatoria gaetneri*; or *Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*). These common names are based on typical bloom time, although some are lucky enough to have their plants bloom more than once per year. To make matters worse many growers label all of the above as *Zygocactus*, so looking at the plant label may not be helpful.

Take a close look at your plant segmented leaves or clades (phylloclades to be precise) and if it has claws it is a Thanksgiving Cactus. A majority of *Zygocactus* or “Christmas Cactus” is Thanksgiving Cactus. So don’t be surprised if yours has claws. Finding these beauties in every color got me hooked and started on my journey to collect the other varieties as well.

True Christmas Cactus are difficult to find and feature smoother more elongated leaf sections, and their flower shape is slightly different as well. They are not grown by most nurseries and you likely won’t find them commercially available. But if you join a local group you can find someone offering to trade or sell you starts. Just be sure you know what you are buying first. And be prepared, some are pricey.

Another way to tell these two varieties apart is to look at their blooms. The anthers, or pollen-bearing parts, of the bloom, can tell you a lot about your plant. The anthers of Thanksgiving Cacti are yellow, in Christmas Cacti they are purplish-brown.

Now about those Easter Cactus I mentioned. These are even more challenging to find, although in recent years I have had luck for a short time in the spring, but you have to be on the lookout and snap them up quickly. These plants have elongated, rounded, scalloped clades with bristles, and very different starburst-shaped blooms. They are the most picky of the three varieties and require very different care.

Care for each of these lovely cacti will be discussed in coming articles.

Source Info:

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/thanksgiving-christmas-cacti/>

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/schlumbergera-gaertneri/>



Upcoming Local Garden Opportunities

By Kathy Rivenbark

Hoffler Creek

January 13 7:45-10:00 AM Early Bird Walk (free)

January 14 Bare Tree Walk 10:00-11:30 AM (\$10 members \$15 non-members)

Contact the website for more information and to register. hofflercreek.org

Norfolk Botanical Gardens

January 10 Mulch-Maximizing Plant and Soil Vitality 10-11:30 AM (\$16/\$12)

January 16 Worm Composting 6:30-8:30 PM (\$40/\$55)

January 23- It's All Latin to Me! "Learn the importance of scientific names and how they can clue you in to the plants they belong to." (\$16/\$21)

January 24 Moss Gardening 1:00-3:00 PM (\$25/\$30)

February 7 Herbaceous Winter Pruning 9:30-11:30 AM (\$16/\$21)

Contact the website for more information and to register.
norfolkbotanicalgarden.org

5 New Year's Resolutions for Gardeners by Les Parks (NBG)

If you missed this article which appeared in the Virginia Pilot on Saturday, December 23, 2023 here is a summary of the 5 things that Les recommends. (submitted by Louise Roesser)

1. **Right Plant, right place-** Do your homework. Ask yourself. How big does it get and do I have enough room? How much light does it need? Will it be easy to water? Does it do well in our climate?
2. **Say no to systemic insecticides-** Systemic insecticides are indiscriminate: They can kill any insect, friend or foes that happens to feed on the treated plant.
3. **Plant more natives-** Native plants are well adapted to our climate and can provide food and shelter for native birds and provide pollination services to native insects.
4. **Think “more garden, less turf”-** Maintaining turf takes a lot of resources (water, fertilizers, pesticides, etc.). Instead increased bed space could be used for growing your own food and provide wildlife food and habitat.
5. **Embrace the chaos-** Plant a diversity of plants, a mix of trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, and ground covers. This will turn your garden into an oasis for the local fauna, including beneficial insects.



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