

June, 2026

**Meetings at 7 pm at West Main Baptist Church Fellowship Hall
First Monday of the month
6:30 pm Socialize and enjoy refreshments**

News & Notes

Is it really mid-June already?! Spring sure was a busy time for gardeners! And we continue to be busy with judicious watering, weeding, harvesting produce and maintaining our gardens. Depending on how you track the seasons, the astronomical summer starts in a few days – on the summer solstice on June 21. But I think the meteorological start of summer on June 1 is more accurate, as hot as it's been recently. Hot and dry, that is. The Danville Register & Bee reported last week that the current drought has been the worst in the past 20 years. The US Drought Monitor website indicates Pittsylvania and Halifax Counties, along with a large swath of southern, central and eastern VA are under extreme drought conditions. But you know this already, hence the frequent and deep watering. I read somewhere that a group of gardeners are known collectively as a sprinkle. If that's true, could we gather a huge number of gardeners together to make some rain? I think the nearby farmers would be happy to join us if there's a chance it would work. Hopefully our region will get some gentle steady showers soon.

Want to help with a project? Want to get some service hours? Opportunities to participate in various DMGA activities are listed on Volunteer Space in Better Impact.

Also, sign-up sheets are available at the monthly meetings or call or email Debra Bailey to sign up.

If you wish to find out how many educational and volunteer hours you have, go to your main page in Better Impact and click on reports. Go to bottom of page and click on Hours and Feedback. It separates your hours by category.

Any DMGA member is welcome to serve as a lab monitor and get to know the class members, have some fun and learn more about the wonderful world of gardening. The 2026 Training Lab Schedule is available on Better Impact ("Files" on the Home Page) and sign-up for lab monitors is on The Volunteer Space (link on BI Home Page-News).

Submitted by Deb Henderson, Editor

2026 Extension Master Gardener Training Class

Let me introduce some members of our training class. Several have generously shared a little bit about themselves.

Trish Ladd lives with her husband Clayton in Danville. Their two children are both in college and will graduate in 2027. Enjoying time with her family is Trish's absolute favorite way to spend any given day. Trish is an amateur gardener who enjoys container gardening and maintaining her current landscape. She loves the process of understanding her plants and learning what they need to grow. She is interested in learning more about kitchen herb gardens. Trish applied to join the DMGA to learn and to get more involved in the community. She said she is excited to be a part of a group that makes a difference.

Aidan Lawrence is a Danville native. He graduated in 2023 from Roanoke College with a BA in History and has been working as a Research Assistant in Archaeology at the Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville since then. He began gardening at home during the summer of my junior year of college growing heirloom vegetables like tomatoes and peppers in containers. He will sing praises of the ubiquitous 5-gallon plastic bucket. After beginning a project at work on plant remains discovered archaeologically in Virginia pre-and-post-colonization, Aidan became very interested in native plants in addition to container gardening. He's always scouting for native plants to grow or starting from fruits or seeds that he often forages in order to re-wild our area a little bit. Currently, he is the greenhouse lead at VMNH and has been growing important Indigenous plants like the 'Three Sisters' and Sacred Tobacco as part of a living exhibit on Indigenous agriculture that can be viewed in person or online at vmnh.net. Besides gardening, Aidan loves to play music, and hike and bike and generally be in nature. He also enjoys sourdough baking, cooking, and conducting fermentation experiments like pickling and alcohol making.

Denise Wyatt currently works as an Administrative Manager for the City of Danville's Public Works Department with almost 30 years of experience. She is proud to have been involved with the establishment of the Bee City USA accreditation for Danville and assists with related events. She is planning to retire next year (August 2027) and is looking forward to doing lots of gardening with both vegetables and flowers. She has been an avid vegetable gardener since her mid-20s and learned to can and freeze her veggies for the family in the early years. She also loves planting flowers in landscape beds at her home and maintains an abundance of indoor houseplants. She has been a widow now six years and also lost a 16-year-old son due to a single car accident in 1999; however, she is a proud grandmother of two from her first-born son and daughter-in-law who live in Maryland. She visits them often.

Donna Martin is a member of the Bluebird Society and monitors 13 bird boxes at Twin Springs School!

Diane Pagen is a licensed master social worker who was never around plants much growing up in New York City and there weren't any plants in her family's apartment. However she always enjoyed looking at gardens. In 2014 she created a sunflower garden on a barren lot at a homeless shelter she worked in. In 2022, she was illegally fired from my social work job in NYC for refusing to take a Covid-19 shot. I came to Danville to get away from NYC Covid tyranny. It was in Danville that she got the chance to plant again. Diane really likes pollinator plants because she likes watching the bees and butterflies. Her favorite flower is the Mexican Sunflower. Diane prefers being outside rather than in the house, and says it's been great to be part of a group of people who share her love of gardens.

Sherri Wright recently retired as a School Nurse. She has been involved in gardening since she was in 4-H as a child. She is a Virginia Master Naturalist and a member of the board of the Dan River Basin Association. Her family always had a big garden before moving to Danville in 1984. Here, she is surrounded by trees which she loves but very little sunlight gets through. Now, Sherri has a container garden with flowers and herbs, and she also planted 5 different kinds of native grasses to prevent erosion. Sherry is enjoying the MG training and the DMGA meetings very much.

2026 Extension Master Gardener Training Class

(Continued)

Jesse Houston works in the logistics field. A coworker gave me my first pothos as a water plant about three years ago and helped me learn how to keep it alive. Since then, she has continued learning and has been largely successful with houseplants. Jesse is hoping to grow her skills through the Master Gardener program by learning more about vegetable gardening and creating pollinator-friendly spaces. Outside of gardening, she enjoys light reading, going for walks, and occasionally joining organized 5K walk events. She's excited to learn more and connect with everyone in the group!

Bryn DeBass is originally from northwestern PA; however, she has lived longer in VA now than PA. She lives in Java with her husband and their cats and dogs. They have two children - our son Caleb is 23 and starting his second year of medical school and our daughter Abi is 20 and started her third year of a Physician Assistant program. Bryn is an optometrist working in Chatham and she and her husband own Forge Jiu Jitsu in Danville. When not at work, Bryn can usually be found in the garden or working on a home improvement project. She has always loved gardening as a small home gardener and houseplant grower. She and her husband purchased our current home from a Master Gardener and inherited a fantastic home garden and beautifully planted yard - and thus my journey with DMGA began!

Arlene Kramke graduated with a bachelor's degree in Biology from Rivier College and worked in Quality Control for 2 major companies and operated a gas chromatograph. She went back to school and became a special education (SPED) teacher and taught for 23 years. Arlene has 3 children. She has had a vegetable garden for over 30 years. And she loves roses!

Strawberries-The Berries that are not Berries! Fun Facts

By Isla Wiles

- * They are the first fruit to ripen in the spring. (Hooray!)
- * The average American eats 3.4 pounds of fresh strawberries each year and 1.8 pounds of frozen strawberries. (I wonder how many uncounted pounds are consumed at "pick your own" berry farms!)
- * Eight strawberries provide more Vitamin C than an orange. (Who stops at just eight though?)
- * They don't ripen after being picked. (Of course, ripe ones don't last long before they begin to deteriorate in looks and flavor.)
- * They can be white, yellow, pink, or golden. (For me, strawberry shortcake has to be red!)
- * They are the only fruit that has the seeds on the outside, with each berry having around 200.
- * They are grown in every state.
- * In 2022 in Virginia, 227 acres of strawberries were grown, with Loudoun, Spotsylvania, Fauquier, and Frederick counties having the most farms.
- * In reference to their not being berries, botanically, they are in a class of their own because of those exterior seeds.

Source: *Cultivate*, Virginia Farm Bureau. Spring 2026. "Did You Know?", page 3 and "Savor the Season with Strawberries," page 28.

Seed Starting: Cells, Blocks and Snails!

By Elizabeth Tomlin

Starting your own plants from seed can save you a lot of money. There many different ways to start seeds. We are all familiar with the traditional seed tray where you fill the wells with seed starter and then add your seeds. These are convenient as it is easy to keep them labelled and they are very easy to handle for transplanting. The seeds are in a fairly small amount of soil though, so must be watered frequently. The roots of the plant can also be damaged removing them from the individual cells, so there is some transplant shock and they must be watered well until established.



A second method that I use most of the time is making soil blocks. To the right are the instructions for the soil block make that I use from Amazon. These have their pros and cons as well. I like that the seeds are in a fairly



dense block of soil, and they end up with a larger and more diffuse root system. See the block with tomato seedlings in it to the left (I know I need to thin this!). They are easy to water as you just fill the tray and water from the bottom. There is almost no transplant shock as you just put the whole block in the ground without pulling it out of a plastic cell. They are difficult to label and keep track of though and can crumble if you are not careful when handling them.

SEEDLING RAISING & PROTECT TENDER ROOTS



I tried a new method this spring which was creating a seed snail. I cut up old feed bags into strips and used the same soil mixture as I used for soil blocks which is about half potting soil and half peat moss. I laid out the strip of feed bag and piled soil on it, and then rolled it up, and stapled it at the end. There was kind of a fold on the bottom part of the feedbag strip that held the soil in. Then I pressed my seeds in and kept it watered under the same grow lights as my seed blocks and trays.



The seedlings in the seed snails grew well and got taller than the seedlings in seed trays or soil blocks. This was quite a space-efficient way to start seeds.



You can see that when I unfurled the seed snail to plant the seedlings, that the nasturtiums at least, had very long roots. The downside to these is that you are basically planting bare root seedlings so need a cool wet day to transplant, or else they need to be potted for a bit before transplanting.



Photos by Elizabeth Tomlin

Mushroom Compost

By Mitzi Marlow

Mushroom compost has become quite popular and used extensively in agriculture and home gardening. The compost is a very valuable organic additive that can greatly improve soil health by containing microbes and nutrients that enrich our soils health and therefor providing stronger and healthier vegetable and flower results.

What exactly is Mushroom compost? Mushroom compost is made by using forest, industrial, agricultural and livestock waste and their by-products. It is largely composed of straw and hay, which provide carbon, and animal bedding, poultry waste, cocoa shells, corn cobs and cotton seed provide nitrogen.

It is referred to as “Spent Mushroom Substrate” and is a result of the mushroom growing process. Before being removed from the production houses it is steam cleaned to remove any diseases or weed seeds.

Using this compost helps as a soil conditioner and fights disease borne pathogens. As a soil amendment, a high amount of organic matter content can restore soil property which in turn yields a higher number of crops. When using the compost, the best method is layering of one to three inches on the top of the soil to be used and then incorporating it into the soil below, mixing thoroughly. It is important to note that a high-quality compost has a lower salt content and asking your dealer to point out the better quality. Good incorporation or tilling helps to lower the dilution also. Please note that the compost is not recommended for fruit trees.

Keeping the soil healthy without using additives that cause “run off” is important today in order to provide good stewardship to our soil and our crops and creates a stronger, more sustainable soil for the future.

<https://ouci.dntb.gov.ua/en/works/73NWV29/>

<https://pasafarming.org/mushroom-compost-qa/>

<https://www.americanmushroom.org/consumers/mushroom-compost-faq/>

Members of the DMGA have been out and about town this spring, participating in various activities.



Pat Morgan led the propagation lab for the DMGA trainees and she came prepared with her Hori Hori knife and a hatchet!



Pat Morgan, Trish Ladd and Judy Hodnett volunteered at the pollinator garden at City Hall. DMGA supported the Garden Club of Virginia Historic Garden Week and our local garden clubs.



DMGA members Ann Sylves, Isla Wiles & Billy Holland ably man the table at the Danville Community Market.



The Annual Plant Sale at the Danville Science Center on April 18th was a big success, led by Sandy Pruitt and Ann Sylves.



Dana and Barry Reagan welcomed visitors to the Danville Science Center's Butterfly Welcome, the day the butterfly house opens for the season.

Lots of plants for sale and lots of customers at the plant sale!



City of Danville plants Lady Astor Roses

After listening to our speaker from the Langhorne House Museum at our May meeting, perhaps a little history might be of interest. The following is an article that is archived on the Danville City website from March 23, 2012. It has been abridged and slightly modified for reasons of space. If you'd like to see the full archived article, it is available at:

<https://www.danville-va.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=686&ARC=1337>

Please note that Growing Virginia no longer sells this rose. And if you'd like to see the Lady Astor Rose, visit behind the Danville Museum of Fine Arts & History. It is growing in the side yard of the museum's building on 126 Sutherlin Avenue.

City of Danville plants Lady Astor Roses Posted on: March 23, 2012

Lady Astor Roses are being planted in locations throughout the city, and when they bloom in the days ahead, citizens will be able to appreciate the deep, pink-colored flower that serves as the city's official flower. The city of Danville Public Works Department picked up the flowers this week at the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research, which donated 200 plants to the city as part of one of its projects.

Lady Astor Roses are hybrid tea roses with a double blossom. They are considered mature when they reach four to five feet in height

The Lady Astor Rose project is a partnership among Growing Virginia, Langhorne House, the city of Danville and the Institute's Dan River Plant Propagation Center. Growing Virginia has the marketing rights and will eventually market the rose to the general public. The rose will be made available initially to garden clubs, master gardeners and civic groups for pre-order beginning April 2, for delivery next spring.

Nancy Witcher Langhorne was born in Danville in 1879, and went on to become Lady Astor, the first woman to serve in the British Parliament. She returned to visit Danville in 1922, and distributed roses to local school children. Several of those original roses have been preserved throughout the years, and are being propagated at the Institute.

Submitted by Deb Henderson

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All members are encouraged to write an article for the newsletter that would be of interest to the group. Please include reference to sources used in preparation and credit for photos. Send articles, reminders and photos related to your DMG activities to Debhenderson674@aol.com or text 434-489-8612. Thank you.

Many thanks to all who have contributed to our newsletter.

Useful QR Codes for Better Impact, DMG Facebook & website & Volunteer Space

