

December, 2025

**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 from Debra Bailey, Volunteer Coordinator

Flyers describing Spring to Green that can be distributed around town to groups or businesses in order to spread the word about STG are available at the office. Come by the office and pick up one (or several).

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 will be available at the monthly meetings or call or email to sign up!!

There was a question about how to record contact hours in Better Impact when multiple DMGA members participate in an event with multiple contacts with the public. I attended a coordinator meeting and got to talk with Grace Stern directly. As I have stated before if 3 are at the farmers market with 20 contacts, then all 3 log the 20 contacts if you stay all 4 hours. If you were there for 2 hours, then only log contacts for those 2 hours. At the end of each year the state combines all Virginia volunteer hours and then DIVIDES all of the hours by a number.

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.

Someone gave me their personal apron last year after Spring to Green. Can you let me know who you are?

Yes, it's time for me to start bugging you about putting your hours in Better Impact. Please put your hours in regularly. The deadline is December 31st. As you remember from last year, that is also time to reenroll on Better Impact. In order for me to make the list of milestone awards for Grace at VT, EVERYTHING needs to be updated.

Have any questions? Call me at 336-340-1981 or email cactilady58@gmail.com

Announcements from Bonnie Hill, Chair, Training Committee

2025 EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER GRADUATES

Congratulations to Diane Greene pictured with Debra Bailey upon moving from intern to a full Master Gardener and to the graduates of our 2025 EMG Training Class, who have begun meeting their volunteer hours as Interns: Michelle Andres, Brandy Hanners-Marlowe, Olivia Lineberger, Nene McWilliams, Nancy Riddell, and Lee Anne Sheridan. Allison Solway also completed the training and started her volunteer hours but has moved to Florida. Please welcome the interns into the volunteer and educational activities of DMGA.



2026 EXTENSION MASTER GARDEER TRAINING CLASS

If you know anyone with interest in joining our 2026 class, please send their name, telephone and email to Bonnie Hill (dabohill@verizon.net, 434-203-2554). In early December, we plan to contact those who have expressed interest, giving them information on the training and a link to registration in Better Impact. Registration will be open until early February. The fee of \$175 is all-inclusive for the online instruction and in-person labs and scholarships are available.

They Carry Their Houses on Their Backs

By Isla Wiles

On the last day of October, I was giving my dog Lucy, supervised "free" time in my fenced-in garden area. Typically, she zooms, barks at squirrels, and . . . digs. I always investigate her excavations to determine whether she is digging up a plant or bulb that might not be good for her or that I don't want to be disturbed. This time she dislodged a turtle. (I grew up calling these terrapins, a general name, but it is likely a box turtle.) I thought it might be hibernating, so after I put Lucy in the house, I returned and put the turtle at the same depth it was "discovered". Research indicates turtles' type of hibernation is brumation, which is a state of low activity when their bodily functions slow, and they stop eating to "hunker down" for the winter. (Sustaining America's Aquatic Biodiversity - Turtle Biodiversity and Conservation.)

Box turtles are the most commonly seen turtles in our area and are North Carolina's state reptile. They belong to the 58 species that are found in the United States and Canada and are part of the 350 living species worldwide. All turtles belong to the taxonomic order of Testudines and are reptiles. Their names differ, depending on species and where they live, which is worldwide, except for the oldest regions. Generally, tortoise refers to those who live on land, turtle to those who live in saltwater, and terrapin to those who live in freshwater. Sometimes turtles are called living fossils because their basic body structure has not changed since they lived at the same time as the dinosaurs. Giant tortoises of the Galapagos Islands are some of the longest living vertebrates with some documented as living as long as a century. Box turtles are like humans in reproduction; (Sustaining America's Aquatic Biodiversity - Turtle Biodiversity and Conservation). They reach sexual maturity in their teens, and "produce few offspring and live for decades (Sustaining America's Aquatic Biodiversity - Turtle Biodiversity and Conservation. Other turtles take longer to reproduce, as much as twenty years.

Some turtles are strictly herbivores while others are strictly carnivores. Some are carnivores when young and herbivores as adults. The box turtle eats slugs (hooray!), carrion, berries, and leafy plants and prefers "hardwood forests, open grasslands, and agricultural areas (Sustaining America's Aquatic Biodiversity - Turtle Biodiversity and Conservation).

Turtles' survival depends on their surviving predators and human activities. Racoons are particularly fond of turtle eggs, although turtles are vulnerable to predators at any stage of life. The gender of the turtle egg is determined by the heat of the developing embryo with hot weather producing females and cool weather males. Smaller turtles produce 1-10 eggs, while larger ones produce around 200. Human activities affecting their survival include loss of habitat, shipping to Asia for food, getting caught in commercial fishing nets, contracting respiratory disease, traffic deaths, and loss of food sources because of invasive wetland plants (Sustaining America's Aquatic Biodiversity - Turtle Biodiversity and Conservation).

Turtles are interesting both to small children and adults (and curious dogs); who can resist the intrigue of their carrying their houses (the original mobile homes) on their backs? In most cases, they are slow enough to observe and nonaggressive, with some having the ability to withdraw into their shells. Humans' interest in them is reflected in art, culture, and literature from some of the ancient and Native American myths to "The Hare and the Tortoise." Large turtles such as the Galapagos and the sea turtles who nest along the Atlantic coast, whose nests are protected, elicit much deserved publicity, but all turtles have their place in the ecosystem as prey for other animals and consumers of plants and other animals. In addition, because of their longevity, they may give clues to how humans can live longer and better (Sustaining America's Aquatic Biodiversity - Turtle Biodiversity and Conservation).

Work Cited:

Sustaining America's Aquatic Biodiversity - Turtle Biodiversity and Conservation. Vt.edu, 2020, relieved from www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/420/420-529/420-529.html.

Look, he really is carrying his house on his back! Photo taken by Isla Wiles



Reminder from Sandy Pruitt

For those who like to curl up in winter to read about gardening, there is a trove of articles, webinars, podcasts available at the Va Master Gardener website. All of them count toward Continuing Education hours. Here's the link:

https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/ce/?utm_source=cmpgn_ext_mstrgrdn&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=vtEXTVAMstrGrdn_fall%20in%20season

Gibson Greenhouse

The 'Greenhouse Gang' has been hard at work, teaching multiple classes to kindergarteners and 4th graders, cleaning up the shed, office, pollinator garden & tending to the lima bean patch. Donated native plants from Sandy Pruitt were transplanted. And the lovely succulent centerpieces for STG are happy there.



Eastern Sweetshrub *Calycanthus floridus*

By Mitzi Marlow

Autumn is a wonderful time to plant for the following year as it allows for acclimation before the ground freezes. Scrubs especially do much better at this time. They are very versatile and can be used in many ways, such as defining a garden; and provide undercover for taller trees, a screen, or shelter for birds. The Eastern Sweet Scrub is a woody, deciduous scrub known for many different names such as Carolina Allspice, Spicebush, Strawberry bush, sweet shade, sweet bush and sweet bubbly. It grows upright and rounded, having beautiful magnolia shaped flowers that are smaller than an inch and are reddish to maroon in color. They are wonderfully fragrant and bloom from April to July. Later in the fall, these same blooms turn into oblong fruits, and then into seed capsules that may last all winter. The leaves which start as green and feel leathery, turn golden yellow, then rusty brown before falling in the late fall. Native to the Appalachians, and south of New England to Texas, they are very hardy scrubs. Growing best in rich soil, they will tolerate poor soil quite well, including clay, especially if it is well drained. They thrive in the full sun and bloom more profusely but do well in part shade also. The height is usually 6-10 feet, and the width is 6-12 feet. If you are not using it as a screen, then you can cut back the suckers in the spring. The leaves are profuse, making the scrub very dense. If using a nursery seedling, plant the crown at soil level and water very well, making sure the roots are moist. If planting in the fall, check the soil, especially if the weather remains warm to make sure it doesn't dry out with the heat. Place mulch around them, making sure it doesn't touch the plant's stems. Once established they are very low maintenance, require very little pruning unless you would like a denser scrub; you can prune 1/3 of the top in spring. They are also drought tolerant, resistant to disease, insects, and deer. The sweet scrub is a wonderful choice for its aroma also. Planting in a pot close to the patio or other entrances allows the wonderful fruity scent to be fully enjoyed. It is a wonderful nesting site for birds, and butterflies and pollinators are very attracted to the flower, as are other insects. The flowers can be cut and used in arrangements, and the leaves can be dried and used in potpourri. It is a very showy scrub with many attributes to be enjoyed.

https://www.clemson.edu/cafls/demo/plant_profiles/calycanthus-floridus-carolina-allspice.html

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/calycanthus-floridus> <https://plantfinder.nativeplanttrust.org/plant/Calycanthus-floridus>

https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/calycanthus_floridus.shtml <https://ufi.mgcafe.uky.edu/treetalk/nativeplant-carolina-allspice>



Photo taken by Brandy Hanners Marlow

The Language of Flowers

Article & photos by Elizabeth Tomlin

I read a book recently called “The Language of Flowers” by Vanessa Diffenbaugh. The main character has a gift for making flower arrangements that change people's lives based on the Victorian language of flowers. It is a wonderful book with unforgettable characters and an intriguing mystery. It also introduced me to the language of flowers or floriography.

Floriography was popular during the Victorian era (1837-1901) as a way to express emotions and sentiments that could not be openly stated due to strict social conventions. Each flower was assigned a specific meaning, allowing individuals to communicate feelings of love, friendship, or even disdain through carefully arranged bouquets. I thought it would be fun to share the meanings of some of the flowers from my garden.

In Diffenbaugh’s book, the main character says that there is only ONE true dictionary of flower meanings, but it turns out that there are many interpretations of flower meanings depending on where you look. I used the website <https://victorian-era.org/meaning-of-flowers.html> as well as a couple of other places. Often the meaning depends on the variety or color. For example, there are 32 different meanings for roses depending on variety and color and

nine different kinds of pinks. There are even different meanings attributed to different varieties of marigolds. You almost have to be a botanist to interpret your bouquet!



Yellow rose

Decrease of love, jealousy

The first “flower” that came to mind was the dead leaves that Carolyn Bracken used in her arrangement at the November meeting. I thought they

were cheerful, but it turns out that dead leaves mean melancholy. Roses are of course very common in flower arrangements, and we typically think of them as representing love, but yellow roses actually signify a decrease of love or jealousy.

It probably comes as no surprise that foxgloves mean insincerity as they are a very toxic plant.

Echinacea, on the other hand, with its medicinal properties represents strength, resilience and healing

Spider cleome, with its wispy tendrils and ethereal growth habit, represents mystery, growth and creativity. Cheerful zinnia represents thoughts of friends



Foxglove

Insincerity



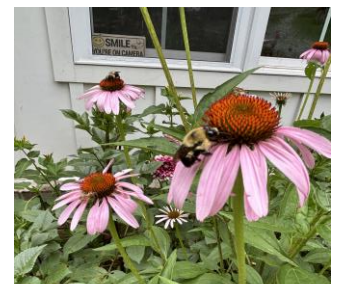
Dead leaves

Melancholy

A bouquet of peonies, marigold, hydrangea and sunflowers would be very unfriendly indeed as peonies represent shame and bashfulness, French marigolds signify jealousy, hydrangea represents a boaster and heartlessness, and tall sunflowers represent haughtiness.

Dahlias which are popular in arrangements represent instability. I wonder if it is because they tend to flop over?

Thinking about the talk we had on monarchs, I decided to look up milkweed. I had to look beyond the Victorian flower dictionary to find that milkweed represents



Purple coneflower (Echinacea)

Strength, resilience, healing

transformation and rebirth.

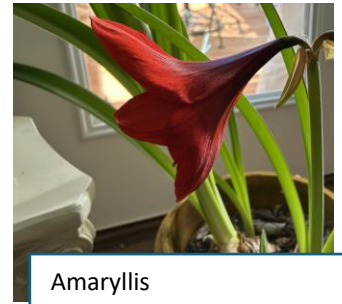


Spider cleome

Mystery, growth, creativity

signifies pride, timidity, but also splendid beauty.

I hope you enjoyed this brief introduction to floriography, the language of flowers and are inspired to look up the meaning of some of your favorites. If you are looking for a good read, I highly recommend Vanessa Diffenbaugh's book "The Language of Flowers".



Amaryllis

Pride, timidity, splendid beauty

Rosemary was a very popular plant with the Victorians to signify



Dahlia

Instability



Rosemary

Remembrance



remembrance. Other common herbs also have meaning. Parsley signifies festivity, sage represents domestic virtue and thyme means activity.

Finally, popular holiday flowers have more cheerful meanings. Pointsettia means love, joy and good fortune, and amaryllis



Pointsettia

Love, joy, good fortune



Milkweed

Transformation and rebirth

Notes from the 2025 Christmas Party & Graduation

DMGA President Elizabeth Tomlin spoke to our group and noted major accomplishments from 2025. And much has been accomplished despite being without an extension agent all year. Bonnie Hill, Training Coordinator, facilitated the training and graduation of a new class of interns, with the help of many who assisted with labs and such. The Gibson Greenhouse volunteers have transitioned the many responsibilities involved in educating children about gardening, in light of Billy Holly stepping back after leading the efforts there for many decades. The Spring to Green committee has planned a day of excellent speakers, vendors and food. Dana Reagan was recognized for her many contributions to our organization this year, working on improving communication and the effectiveness of our association through the new handbooks, membership roster, schedule of events and social media presence.

And there was one more announcement.....

Jessica Driver, who has been a member of DMGA, has been hired as the new extension agent, assuming the job in mid-January, 2026. We welcome Jessica to this new role and look forward to working with her in the new year!

Lots of delicious food & lovely decorations!



Elizabeth & Bonnie

Jessica Driver, new extension agent





“The Shed Girls” Michelle Andres & Isla Wiles – their hard at work on the shed has been impressive at the Gibson Greenhouse – getting it done!

Big thanks to all the Greenhouse Gang for all their good work!

Linda Copeland doing what ya do at the greenhouse!



Looks like Rhonda Harris truly enjoys working in the greenhouse.

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Please send photos of your DMG activities to Deb Henderson674@aol.com or text 434-489-8612

Many thanks to all who have contributed to our newsletter, and my apologies to Elizabeth for scattering her lovely photos all over her article!
Technical difficulties + user errors!

Useful QR Codes for Better Impact, DMG Facebook & website, Volunteer Space &
Spring to Green Eventbrite registration page

