

BLUE RIDGE DIGEST

Blue Ridge District Virginia Federation of Garden Clubs

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

At this time of year, amid the icy chill, and with spring seed and nursery catalogs finally beginning to arrive, it is only natural that our thoughts, as gardeners, are focused forward to all the beautiful things that will be blooming in our gardens in a few months.

While that's all well and good, how about we also give a bit of well-deserved attention and respect to the lovely little things that are blooming in our gardens right now. Or would be if we had planted them.

I'm referring to those Wee Wonders of the Mid-Winter Garden: snowdrops, hardy cyclamen and winter aconite. Snowdrops and hardy cyclamen bloom in January no matter what the weather is, and winter aconite follows directly along behind them. All are small, but are also bright and beautiful and immensely joyful. Wee Wonders, indeed.

On a larger scale there is the vivid light green of *helleborus foetidus*, already beginning to come into flower. Its bright blast of color seems totally improbable against a grey mid-winter background, but there it is, catching your eye and making you smile. While you're waiting for spring...

It goes without saying, of course, that we are all well aware that actual spring in our neck of the woods is a glorious thing- both in our gardens and in our surroundings. Apropos of that, our program for the Blue Ridge District Spring Meeting will be a presentation by Dr. Rebecca Ross on Spring Wildflowers of the Blue Ridge. Details are elsewhere in this issue, but this is a program you won't want to miss. Plan to come and bring a friend...or two. And get your reservation in early.

To end on a Philosophical Note: we have all heard the term "passionate gardener" either directed toward ourselves or toward others. The philosophical question, therefore, is: Is there such a thing as a "dis-passionate gardener", or even a "semi-passionate gardener"? I personally think not, but you may each have your own view on the subject. To be pondered while reading your seed catalogues.

Stay warm, Felice

FEBRUARY 2024 ISSUE

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

2024

- March 23-24 Daffodil Flower Show, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond
- March 27 Blue Ridge District Board of Directors' Meeting—Roanoke
- April 24 Spring District Meeting—Roanoke ALL garden club members invited.
- May 1 Deadline for *Blue Ridge Digest* and *Old Dominion Gardener*
- May 21-22 VFGC 90th Convention, Boar's Head Inn, Charlottesville VA
- June 1 Dues Deadline
- June 2-5 NGC Convention—Denver
- June 2-8 National Garden Week



2023-2025 PRESIDENT'S THEME

"Sowing the Seeds for Tomorrow's Gardeners"

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WEBSITES

National Garden Clubs Inc.

<http://gardenclub.org>

Virginia Federation of Garden Clubs Inc.

<http://viriniagardenclubs.org/VFGC/>

Newsletter Deadlines: August 1
 send info to: November 1
 shirle4858@gmail.com February 1
 540-989-3137 May 1
 Free to members with email
 Subscription if mailed - \$8/yr. or \$16/2 yr.

CLUB NEWS

Congratulations to the **Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs** for their impressive achievements in the United Way of Roanoke Valley's "Fashion for Evergreens" competition at the Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center! Winning 1st Place in the Public Vote and 3rd Place in the Judges Award is truly an outstanding accomplishment.

The "Bee-lieve" bee garden concept was not only visually appealing but also carried an important message about promoting healthy and sustainable habitats for bees and other pollinators. The fact that Roanoke has been designated a BEE City since 2022 adds even more significance to the theme. It's commendable that the Roanoke Valley Garden Club played a pivotal role in securing this title for the city.



Chairperson Sherrene Wells and the entire team deserve praise for their creativity and decorating ideas, which clearly resonated with both the judges and the public. Being selected to participate in the "Fashion for Evergreens" Fundraiser for only the second year and achieving such success is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs.

The annual event at the Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center not only brings joy to the community but also serves as a significant fundraiser for the United Way of Roanoke Valley. The generosity of thousands of guests who take part in the self-guided tour and vote monetarily for their favorite trees has raised over \$65,000 to support Roanoke families facing financial challenges.

The growing waiting list to participate in this event underscores its popularity, and it's fantastic that the Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs can showcase the diverse talents and creativity of its member clubs. The commitment to spreading the word about the organization's contributions to gardening in the Roanoke Valley is admirable.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to everyone who voted for the RCGC tree, and it's exciting to hear that the committee is already looking forward to 2024 with a new theme and plans for another stunning tree. Best wishes for continued success and creativity in the years to come!



The **Boones Mill Garden Club** ladies had a delightful visit to the historic Hotel Roanoke for their Annual Christmas Luncheon held on December 9, 2023. The event was in memory of club member, Gelene Amos, who passed away in February 2023. She was an active member since the 1980s. Her son, Gary, gave a generous donation in her memory to the club and specified they use the funds to enjoy an outing together. The lunch buffet in the Regency Room was delicious! They toured the Christmas Trees on display. They stated the "honey bee" tree designed by the Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs was outstanding!



The **Boones Mill Garden Club** participated in the first ever Boones Mill Community Christmas Parade. Club members, Yvonne Abshire and Stephanie McCafferty, headed up the Decoration Committee for their golf cart float. The cart was outlined in a beautiful garland made with various evergreen branches and berries as well as battery operated Christmas lights. So festive! They had a grand time riding on the golf cart as members made a few laps around their little town! Plans are to participate every year.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

WESTCHESTER GARDEN CLUB
Ronda Clark

MAYWOOD GARDEN CLUB
Adam Ryan

NEW CASTLE GARDEN CLUB
Cheryl Parker



Zephyranthes atamasca (Atamasco Lily)

IN MEMORY

VICKY PIPER
Salem Garden Club

SHIRLEY McGINTY
Southside Garden Club

(Please send death notifications
to the BRD Editor)

The biennial **Bedford Council of Garden Clubs** Christmas Home Tour took place at Historic Avenel December 2nd-3rd, 2023. The theme was "Christmas Through the Ages at Historic Avenel." Each of the five clubs chose a room, or the outside wraparound porch to decorate and a decade from the 1830s - 1940s.



BLUE RIDGE FLOWER SHOW

JUDGES COUNCIL

In our last Blue Ridge Digest, clubs were encouraged to have a flower show during this administration. I wonder how many clubs have taken on this challenge issued by our VFGC President Val Story?

For clubs that meet in members' homes, why not have a placement flower show this year in a member's home? Use kitchen counters, an island, and table for horticulture and place designs on family room, living room, and dining room tables and sideboards. Book cases and mantles are excellent locations for small designs. If a large dining room table is available, stage one class of four designs on it by sectioning it into four spaces by using ribbon, for instance. Home office desks offer another display space. If you have a flower show in the summer use furniture on a sunporch or deck to place exhibits.

Some of our Blue Ridge District garden clubs belong to the Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs and our flower show can be staged there. A few BR garden clubs have staged a flower show in their local library. Why not have a flower show at a museum, school, church, or a retirement community?

If you need help writing the flower show schedule for your club's show, please let me know. Once a schedule has been completed, please submit it for review by Betsy Klein our BR District Flower Show Schedules/Evaluation Chairman before distributing the schedule to members.

Janice Clem, BR Flower Show Judges Council



Aquilegia canadensis (Eastern Columbine)

EDIBLE LANDSCAPING

Edible landscaping (also known as *Foodscaping*) is as the name implies - landscaping with vegetables and fruits along with or in place of flowers and plants in your yard. Based on the "[Victory Gardens](#)" of World War II, edible landscaping allows you to enjoy a beautiful yard and delicious fruit, vegetables and/or herbs.

Blueberry

Vaccinium sect.



A good place to start is with your landscaping plan. Consider the USDA Zone you are in. Most of us are in Zone 7. Check the internet to find what plants grow best in your zone. Other places would be to check out local farmers markets to see what plants are offered and to check plants at local nurseries. Don't hesitate to ask for advice. Decide what plants you want to start with - Are there existing plants that you want to replace with edibles? What size space will be available? What plants would be suitable? Think about what foods you like to eat as you plan. Almost any food plant can be used as edible landscaping.

Some plants are more beautiful than others - like towering dill, bright nasturtiums, or hearty mint or thyme as ground cover, or tall sunflowers along the fence or property line. Fruit trees such as cherry, apple, peaches and pears also come in a small or dwarf variety. Vegetables including squashes and melons, tomatoes, beans, and root crops provide interest. And don't forget about vining plants.

If you have a limited amount of time for gardening you might want to plant mostly perennials like fruit and nut trees, berries, asparagus, and other shrubs for low maintenance yet providing you with fresh fruits and veggies for years. Annuals like tomatoes, peas, and root crops require replanting each year and are higher maintenance. Consider starting with just a few changes - it takes trial and error to determine what plants do best in your yard. Enjoy the fruits of your labor!

Stay tuned for more tips.

Glynis Hopkins, Chairman

PLANT FOR POLLINATORS

Mindful gardeners know the damage which has been done by overuse of pesticides. In targeting the insects which cause crop damage, our pollinators have suffered greatly. After hearing the repeated pleas of experts to protect pollinators, particularly bees, I began thinking about the big picture-our food supply's future. Pollinators are responsible for one third of our food by giving us countless fruits, vegetables and nuts. In addition, plants also provide medicines, oils and fibers such as cotton. Thriving plants provide food and cover for wildlife, keep waterways clean, prevent soil erosion, produce the oxygen we breathe, and absorb CO2 (counteracting global climate change). Because almost 90% of plant species rely on pollinators to reproduce, they must be protected.



While thumbing through *Mother Earth News* last summer, I noticed an ad for a book, 100 Plants to FEED THE BEES, Provide a Healthy Habitat to Help Pollinators Thrive. I ordered the book thinking it would provide needed insight before starting the 2024 gardening season. I found it to be a rich source of valuable information. The book is beautifully done, compiled by the Xerces Society, a global authority on insects and other invertebrates. It features color photos of one hundred native North American plants with maps showing their habitats and symbols indicating which pollinators each attracts, when they bloom and planting tips. It features sections on Native Wildflowers, Native Trees and Shrubs plus a section on Introduced Trees and Shrubs, Herbs and Ornamentals which can be combined with natives to benefit many pollinators.

The book suggests the first simple step toward protecting our pollinators is to provide the flowers they need and, of course, using no pesticides. Even if you aren't interested in exploring the book, I am taking the liberty to

list a few of the plants (common names) which you can easily find-probably from a garden club friend. Please consider planting some of the following: Asters, Beebalm, Black-eyed Susan, Blanketflower, Coreopsis, Ironweed, Joe-Pye Weed, Salvia, Purple Coneflower, Sunflowers, Wild Geranium, Wood Mint. I invite you to join the family of concerned gardeners who plant for the pollinators.

Martha Flora, Conservation/Environmental Education

Information taken from 100 PLANTS TO FEED THE BEES, Provide a Healthy Habitat to Help Pollinators Thrive, The Xerces Society

DAFFODIL FLOWER SHOW

The Virginia Daffodil Society is once again presenting our annual American Daffodil Society accredited flower show on March 23-24, 2024 in Richmond at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. VDS is hoping to attract many new exhibitors for the show this year! To that end, we were hoping that you could include an announcement in the Blue Ridge district newsletter during February or March, and inform your club Presidents so the invitation can be spread among your membership.

The show is open to all daffodil growers to exhibit, is free of charge to enter, and free to attend. VDS members will be on hand to provide entry assistance to those not familiar with the process on March 22 and the morning of March 23. (VDS membership is NOT a requirement to be an exhibitor—we welcome ALL to enter daffodils in the show).

Open to the Public:
Sat. March 23, 2pm-5pm
Sun. March 24, 10am-3:45pm

Exhibitors Welcome:
Bring your Daffodils

Submit Entries:
March 22, Noon-6pm & March 23,
7am-10am

There is no charge to exhibit & materials are provided.
Questions:

Email: vdsdaffshow@gmail.com

Join our Facebook Page: Virginia Daffodil Society



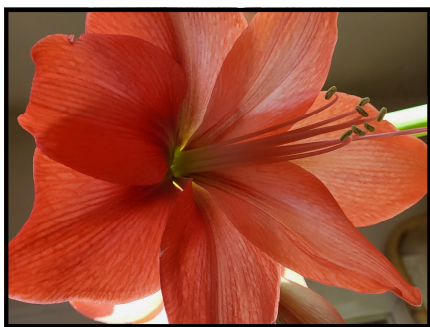
THE COLOR ORANGE

Recently the "The Roanoke Times" published an article on Pantones 2024 color of the year, "Peach Fuzz." The article went on to describe varieties of various flowers, such as peonies and verbena in the shade of peach or coral.

Coincidentally the January issue of "Horticulture" magazine featured a pro design guide "All about Orange." The article, "An Armistice with Orange," was written by Victor Lazzari, a South-Florida based Landscape designer and horticulturist. Lazzari admits that orange had never been his favorite color for garden designs.

Previously he found orange hard to mix with his more preferred colors of pink, fuchsia and magenta. Living and gardening in Florida, however, has changed his thinking because of the prevalence of orange flowers there. He also mentions " that the color is highly attractive to bees and pollinators and he likes to embrace eco-mindedness in his design and plant selections."

The dictionary describes orange as "any color between yellow and red on the color wheel, and for many years the color was called "yellow-red." The name "orange" wasn't developed until the 1400's when Portugal began importing citrus trees from Asia with yellow-red fruit. The fruit was called "naranj" in Arabic, and the name gradually evolved in Old French and English to "orange."



The color encompasses every shade from neon traffic cones to softer peaches, apricots and melons. Lazzari describes orange as "an exciting color more ap-

propriate for gardens in full sun and midday light rather than a serene meditation garden." Orange can either complement or contrast with other colors. Harmonious shades would be pinks and yellows while blue and purple would contrast with orange.

Lazzari goes on to list a variety of flowers, plants and shrubs in various shades of orange. Whatever your preference, there are many beautiful orange flowers that not only stimulate and please the eye, but also are beneficial to pollinators. Check out "Peach Fuzz" for 2024. Gail Trussell, Horticulture/New Cultivars

HERITAGE PLANTS

Heritage or heirloom plants are any plant cultivar that has been grown for a certain number of years that breeds "true to type" from seeds with each generation of the plant having the same combination of traits. Heritage plants are plants that have been cultivated for at least 50 years. Some maintain that it is 100 years.

The term is often used for fruits and vegetable, but many ornamental garden flowers are also considered heirloom plants. Popular heirloom plants include tomatoes, beans, corn, lettuce melons, okra, collard greens, sunflowers, zinnias and foxgloves.

Prior to the industrialization of agriculture, heirloom plants were the dominant crops worldwide, with some cultivars having been grown for hundreds and even thousands of years.

Heritage plants of Virginia are live history. As heirlooms are cherished, so are heirloom vegetables, herbs and flowers of yesteryear. Virginia's rich lineage of historic perennials, annuals, herbs, shrubs and trees are still available for planting today, including some that grew under the watch-care of President Thomas Jefferson. The plants represent native and heritage plants cultivated in America for centuries. They are the natural legacy of our country.

Many of the historic herbs and flowers are great nectar plants that attract more pollinators and beneficial insects.

Heirloom plants are open-pollinated, which means that the wind, birds, humans or bees or other insects pollinate the plants with pollen from different individuals of the same variety. The resulting generation thus breeds true, with roughly the same characteristics as the parent plants. Throughout history humans have selected and saved seeds from the healthiest and most vigorous plants and thereby gradually developed a myriad of unique heirloom cultivars that are accustomed to the soil, climate, and pests of a given region.

Marcia Albert, Trees & Heritage Plants

VERNAL EQUINOX

On the first day of spring, I dig my fingers deep into the soft earth. I can feel its energy, and my spirits soar.

-Helen Hayes, American Actress

INTRODUCING OUR SPEAKER SPRING DISTRICT MEETING

Dr. Rebecca Ross

Dr. Ross was raised on her parent's farm in Ferrum, Virginia, near Ferrum College, and spent her childhood dancing in the fields and forests with the butterflies, birds, and bees. Her mother had 100+ household plants and grew a vegetable garden each summer that supplied the family with food for the entire winter. Rebecca had her first garden at 3 years old---which the rabbits totally devoured. Her father was a bee-keeper.

She has a B.S. in Biology and Chemistry from U.Va., a master's from U.Va., and a doctorate in Biology and Science Ed. from Virginia Tech. She has taken post-graduate courses in genetics and biology from Princeton University, U. of Rochester Medical School, U. of Kansas Medical School, N.C. State, U.Va., and Virginia Tech. She also studied medicinal plants at Chaminade University in Hawaii. She has taught Biology, Anatomy and Physiology, Human Diseases, Nutrition, and Molecular Biology classes-- most recently for 8 years at Ferrum College, and before that at Radford University, Virginia Western Community College, Cave Spring High School, and University of Virginia. She was Director of Educational Outreach for 6 years at the Fralin Biotech Center at Virginia Tech and organized over 150 biotech workshops for high school and college teachers around the state. She organized and ran a Biotech Conference for 5 years for high school and college educators in the Southeastern U.S. She taught Genetics and Biotechnology for 12 years for the Summer Governor's School at University of Lynchburg.

In 1979 and 1980 she was the Chair of the Wildflower Pilgrimage for the Science Museum of Western Virginia under Dr. Tom Krakauer, who spurred her interest in wildflowers. She is a long time member of the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society and the Virginia Native Plant Society. She served in 2005 as President of the National Association of Biology Teachers for 50 states and 23 countries.

Community activities over the years include Symphony Association Board for 8 years and Chair of Symphony Ball, Artist Entertainment for 5 years, on Polo Committee for 5 years; Junior League and Roanoke Valley Horse Show - Chair of Hospitality Committee; Board of Trustees for Roanoke Valley Science Museum for 19 years; Board of Directors for U. Va Roanoke Chapter-15 years and Past President;

President of Scottish Society and on Board for 15 years; Valley Beautiful Foundation for 2 years; Master Gardeners for 5 years; Patrick Henry Allied Families Board for 9 years; Church-Chair of Worship and Altar Guild for 10 years, Vacation Bible School Music- 25 years, Choir-25 years, Bookstore Manager for 7 years.

Travels include Europe-12 times; Hawaii-25 times; China, Hong Kong, Tibet; Bermuda; Canada-5 times; Britain and Scotland-8 times; Mexico, Egypt, Israel.

Her topic for the Blue Ridge District Meeting will be "**Spring Wildflowers of the Blue Ridge.**"



HAS YOUR CLUB DONATED SILENT AUCTION ITEMS FOR THE DISTRICT MEETING?

Clubs and individuals are encouraged to donate an item or items for the Silent Auction at the Blue Ridge District Meetings which are held twice a year—once in the Spring and again in the Fall.

This can be a basket your club puts together, plants or shrubs you grew (or buy an extra one when you are out to donate), items you no longer use, bake your special pound cake, etc.

All of these things will support providing for the facility, speakers and in keeping the registration fee down.

Please contact Felice Proctor at 540-951-9512 or fproctor1@comcast.net or and let her know, in advance, what you will be bringing.



JOIN US
WEDNESDAY
APRIL 24

**BLUE RIDGE DISTRICT
SPRING MEETING**

FEATURED SPEAKER—DR. REBECCA ROSS
“Spring Wildflowers of the Blue Ridge”

See her bio on the previous page.

With all of the current emphasis on native plants and pollinators, this program will be perfect and informative for our Spring gardening. You won't want to miss it!

Schedule:

9:00-10:00 a.m.	Registration check-in
10:00 a.m.	Project Displays
	Vendor Booths open
Noon	Business session & Program
12:45-1:00	Lunch—check your selection on the registration form.
	Business continues
	Announcements
	Door Prizes & Silent Auction

If your club wishes to have a sales table (\$20 fee) contact Felice Proctor at fproctor1@comcast.net

**BLUE RIDGE DISTRICT
SPRING 2024 MEETING
PRE-REGISTRATION FORM**

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

Club _____

Check all that currently apply:

- Past District President
- BRD Board Member
- VFGC Board Member SAR NGC
- Club President (current)
- VFGC Life Member
- SAR Life Member
- NGC Life Member
- GUEST

Lunch Choice from McAlisters (check one):

- Savannah Chopped Salad
- Pecan-berry Salad
- McAlisters Club & chips
- Grilled Chicken Club & chips

Includes a beverage and a cookie or brownie.

Registration & Lunch: \$25.00

Please make check payable to:
Blue Ridge District, VFGC

Mail registration form & check to:

Nancy Powers, Registrar
5211 Hawkbill Circle
Roanoke, VA 24018-8626

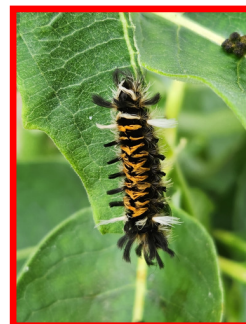
540-776-3206 or charminglysew@cox.net

DEADLINE: Mail by April 15

MILKWEED TUSSOCK CATERPILLAR

When checking for monarch caterpillars (*Danaus plexippus*) on your milkweed plants (*Asclepias syriaca*) and you see these striped tufted caterpillars munching away, do not be alarmed. This is the milkweed tiger moth or milkweed tussock moth caterpillar (*Euchaetes egle*). Just like the monarch caterpillar, tussock caterpillars also eat the milkweed plant; it is their host plant. It is important to have diversity in your gardens, it is essential for a healthy ecosystem. So, there is no harm in leaving the tussock caterpillars to eat a few milkweed plants. If you feel you want to remove this caterpillar from your milkweed, wear gloves. Do not touch the tussock caterpillar as the hairs can irritate the skin and cause skin rashes.

The tussock moth just like the monarch butterfly are desired native pollinators and they both have the poison, cardiac glycosides (cardenolides), in their bodies due to ingesting milkweed. This toxin helps to ward off predators which include parasitic wasps, mantids, birds, bats, and flies. The tussock moth also has an organ that emits an ultrasonic sound to warn bats of their noxious flavor. If you still have concerns about the tussock caterpillar, just plant more milkweed in your yard in order to have plenty of food for both the monarch and tussock caterpillars to eat. More milkweed will also encourage more pollinators including bees, moths, butterflies, flies, and beetles that feed on the milkweed nectar.



The bumblebee (*Bombus* spp.) is especially nice to have in the yard as a pollinator for wild flowering plants, crops, and especially for milkweed because bumblebees are robust and adaptable. Bumblebees stick their legs far into the milkweed flower which is made of hood-shaped petals that conceal bundles of "pollinia", clusters of packed together pollen rather than loose pollen.

Early fall is the best time to plant milkweed seeds. Consider beginning or widening your milkweed habitat and enjoy the diversity it will bring to your gardens.

Janice Fagan-Birds, Butterfly/Pollinator Education



Shirley Edillon, Editor
4858 Glenbrook Drive SW
Roanoke, VA 24018-2800



VIRGINIA BLUEBELLS
(*Mertensia virginica*)

Flower of the
Blue Ridge District—VFGC

Virginia bluebells are native wildflowers that colonize in the moist woodlands of eastern North America from zones 3-8. you can also recreate a bit of their spring magic in your own garden.

Like most spring ephemerals, Virginia bluebells emerge early in the season before significant leaf cover, bloom, and go dormant by mid-June. They are deer and rabbit-resistant: a major plus for suburban and rural gardeners. Plants, when happy, do multiply freely via underground stems and seed.

Plant Virginia bluebells in the spring or fall in rich, moist soil in partial to full shade. Plants can handle a bit of morning sun. The sunnier the area, the more water the plants will need. Hosta are a good choice for companion planting, as are ferns.

The blooms start out yellow, and slowly turn pink and then blue when fully open.

American Meadows

Perfect for the Pollinator Garden!