

# Department of Horticulture

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Roger Harris, Department Head

## August 2012

Greetings everyone! Campus was literally transformed overnight as move-in day 2012 became reality. As one walks along the drill field, the sound of the VT band practicing for the first football game is a nice backdrop to all of the move-in activity. A hint of fall weather is another reminder that fall semester has arrived! This month I am pleased to announce that our long anticipated position of Assistant Professor of Sustainable Food Production Systems has been filled! We also have a new Administrative Assistant. Details are below. Alumni, please let us know what you are up to ([rharris@vt.edu](mailto:rharris@vt.edu)). A good way to stay connected with VT is through the university [You Tube](#) channel. Please visit the [Horticulture](#) Department web site often for special departmental features. If you have not seen our new movie, check it out. Enjoy! With kind regards, *Roger*

Saunders Hall looked great this summer thanks to the landscape renovations installed by the Hort Club. A dry stream bed and new plants created a lush effect. Plants are the answer!



Jim Owen, James Altland, and Cheryl Boyer's website won the ASHS Extension Division Educational Award for 2012. Check it out at [Sustainable Substrates](#)

## New Assistant Professor!

I am delighted to introduce Dr. Megan O'Rourke, our new Assistant Professor of Sustainable Food Production Systems. Dr. O'Rourke is a native of New Jersey and holds a BS degree in Biology from SUNY Stony Brook, an MS in Entomology and Ecology & Evolutionary Biology from Iowa State University, and a PhD in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology from Cornell University. Megan's dissertation at Cornell was titled *Linking Habitat Diversity with Spatial Ecology for Agricultural Pest Management*. After graduate school she did post-doctoral work in the Horticulture Department at Cornell and served as Agricultural Climate Change Advisor with the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service in Washington. Megan and her family are currently in Cambodia, where she is a fellow with the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and working with local farmers on sustainability issues. Megan will begin her research and teaching career with us next August.



Megan and her family wish us peace and sustainable horticulture production. Pictured with Megan are her husband, Aaron Rust (in back), son Jethro Rust (left), daughter Mary Rust (center), and daughter Vera Rust (right)

**Laurie Fox** and her collaborators won a 2012 Blue Ribbon from the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers for their publication *The Urban Nutrient Management Handbook*. Congratulations Laurie!



**Jerry Williams** has left the building! He is shown contemplating cleaning out his office (left), after cleaning out the office (center), and reluctantly handing over the keys to the new occupant, Susan Clark (right).



### **News from the Hahn Horticulture Garden - Holly Scoggins**

*Learn at Lunchtime series* - one Wednesday per month - perfect for on-campus staff and faculty as well as community members and it's free! Upcoming: September 19, noon to 1:00 p.m. at the Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion. Join Virginia Tech turf expert Dr. Mike Goatley as he shares advice for "Sustainable Fall Lawn Care."

We had some *terrific student interns* and workers this summer at the Garden - all current Horticulture majors. Brittaney Nelson was the M. Evan Gardner Intern, Anna Rakes was the Mike and Susie Hildebrand Landscape Intern, and Charles William Knight III (Willie) was our Friends of the Garden intern. Jacob Chance, the 2011 Hildebrand Landscape Intern, spent another summer working with us. Thank you Anna, Brittany, Jacob, and Willie!

**Joyce Latimer, Holly Scoggins, Mara Grossman, and Carly Reynolds** participated in the Ohio Floriculture Association Short Course in Columbus, Ohio.

**Ashley Wills**, our financial manager, and her husband Jon have a new baby girl! Sadie Mae Wills was born on Saturday, August 27. Congratulations Ashley and Jon!

*8th Annual Garden Gala - "Key West"* - More than 225 attendees enjoyed a bit of "Margaritaville" in the Hahn Horticulture Garden on June 9, 2012. Fabulous food, drinks, and entertainment by The Key West Band made it an evening to remember - all capped by an exciting live auction. Gala ticket sales, sponsorships, and auction proceeds raised more than \$17,000 in funds for the Hahn Horticulture Garden. From all of us associated with the garden, we appreciate the generosity shown by our sponsors, auction item donors, and gala guests - many of them HORT alumni. You are helping the garden grow!



Scenes from the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Garden Gala

### Recent Research Awards

**Bingyu Zhao** and his collaborators were recently received notice that the \$1,246,000 project *Identifying Differences in Abiotic Stress Gene Networks between Lowland and Upland Ecotypes of Switchgrass* has been funded by the US Department of Energy.

The USDA NIFA-AFRI Appalachian Foodshed Project (AFP) team which includes **Susan Clark** was awarded a Community Viability Grant (\$7,200) entitled *Strengthening Rural Communities through the Appalachian Foodshed Project* which is sponsored by Virginia Cooperative Extension. This award will be used to expand the work of the AFP.

**Richard Veilleux** and his collaborators were recently awarded \$5,800,000 by the National Science Foundation for their project *Unraveling the Heterozygosity, Allelic Composition, and Copy Number Variation of Potato*

**Mara Grossman**, Ph.D. student in the floriculture program, was awarded a travel grant to present her research results at the annual meeting of the Plant Growth Regulation Society of America meetings in Denver.

## Recent Publications

**Mara Grossman, John Freeborn, Holly Scoggins, and Joyce Latimer.** 2012. Benzyladenine increases branching but reduces root growth of herbaceous perennial liners. HortScience 47(8):10851090.

**Richard Veilleux et al.** 2012. Integration of two diploid potato linkage maps with the potato genome sequence. PloS One 7(4): e36347.

**Rui Xia, Hong Zhu, Yong-giang An, Eric Beers, and Zongrang Liu.** 2012. Apple MiRNAs and tasiRNAs with novel regulatory networks. <http://genomebiology.com/2012/13/6/R47>

**Jerzy Nowak** recently visited Germany to take part in a higher education discussion tour, "Germany Today 2012, Innovative Concepts - Transforming Germany's Academic Landscape". The team met with different groups of higher education and research administrators, university leaders, and politicians. The theme of the tour was: "Change by Exchange".

**Greg Welbaum** has a patent pending for his new temperature gradient table for seed germination research. Check it out at [Gradient Table Patent](#)

I am pleased to announce that **Mary Hagan** has joined us as an Administrative Assistant and will be our Human Resources manager. Mary, her husband Chuck, and two boys, Jon-Michael and Daniel, live outside of Christiansburg. Welcome Mary!



*In Memoriam*

We were all very sad to learn that Dr. Bonnie Appleton had died on July 21. Dr. Appleton retired as Professor of Horticulture at VT's Hampton Roads Agriculture and Extension Center in Virginia Beach in 2010. She worked extensively with nursery and tree care professionals and advised over 60 MS students during her career with VT. Dr. Appleton is fondly remembered by her many students and colleagues. Please see [Dr. Bonnie Lee Appleton](#) for more on her career at Virginia Tech.

