

Department of Horticulture

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Roger Harris, Department Head

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Greetings everyone! Congratulations for making it through the polar vortex. Our 21 inches of powdery snow in Blacksburg was mostly a lot of fun, but I assure you that folks are getting restless for spring break. We are now busy interviewing for the Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Specialist position at the Eastern Shore AREC in Painter and the Translational Genomics of Horticultural Crops Research and Teaching Specialist position to be based at the Blacksburg campus. I will keep you updated in future editions of our e-newsletter on the progress of those searches. -With kind regards, *Reget*

Alumni, please e-mail me (rharris@vt.edu) with an update that you would like to share in our annual newsletter, *Seeds*. The current edition of *Seeds* is now posted on our website. Please visit the [Horticulture](http://www.hort.vt.edu) Department web site often for former *Seeds* editions and special departmental features. It is very helpful for us to know where our alumni have landed and how their careers have progressed. Please help by going to <http://www.alumni.vt.edu/gateway/index.html> to enter your data for us. We would be most grateful! One good way to stay connected with VT is through the university [You Tube](#) channel. Be a life-time Hokie by staying in touch with the [CALS alumni association](#). Check out the current issue of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences "[Innovations](#)" newsletter. We are now on Facebook! Please "like" us and check out news, links to scholarships, new course announcements and all sorts of other departmental information at <https://www.facebook.com/VirginiaTechHorticulture> -

James Rockwell is featured this month on the CALS website. Check it out at <http://www.cals.vt.edu/> and click on his picture on the right side of the page. "James Rockwell from Stephen City, Va., is a junior at Virginia Tech. He is currently the President of the Horticulture Club and a member of Pi Alpha Xi, the Horticulture honor society. James has been the recipient of many scholarships. He is a teaching assistant with Barbara Leshyn's Floral Design classes. He is also an Ambassador for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, which includes working with incoming students, recruiting of potential students, and representing our college from a student perspective. His ambition is to go into greenhouse production and have his own greenhouse operation. He enjoys plant production, even taking the capstone Ornamental Plant Production class early so he wouldn't miss it. In addition to all the above, James works part time in the department and is a creative, cheerful asset to the department."



Kentland Student Farm Update: by **Alex Hessler**. The production season at the Kentland Student Farm is off to a cold and early start this year. Two vintage Allis-Chalmers G cultivating tractors have been exhumed from their rusty resting places in the old hay barn. In the capable hands of the Kentland farm crew, they should be up and running by springtime. Twenty thousand onions were seeded in the greenhouse in early February with the help of students from the Organic Vegetable Production course. Transplants for a quarter-acre of broccoli will be seeded next, all of which will be blanched and frozen at the Southgate Food Processing Center on campus. Dining Services is eager to put their industrial blanching, vacuum-sealing, and flash-freezing equipment to good use this summer. Opportunities to preserve fresh produce during the summer, when all but one dining unit are closed, will become an important part



of the production system at Kentland over the next few years. Homemade marinara, pesto, and lavender ice cream were a recent topic of discussion with chefs at Turner Place dining hall! Farms and Fields, a venue at Owens dining hall, is the primary recipient of Kentland-grown produce during the spring and fall. They feature local and organic meat and produce in home-style, a la carte meals, including vegetarian options.

Dining Services employees provide most of the field labor at the farm during the summer months. Students in CALS are invited to volunteer at the farm to gain practical skills in organic vegetable production. Come fall, interested students can participate in a pilot-apprenticeship program, earning academic credit through their experience. A new high-tunnel to be erected this summer at the Urban Horticulture Center will provide opportunities for hands-on learning much closer to campus. Contact **Alex Hessler** if you are interested in involving your students in any of these projects, or would simply like to arrange a farm tour.

DeAnna D'Attilio (MSc student working with **Tony Wolf** at the Winchester AREC) successfully defended her thesis, *"Optimizing nitrogen fertilization practices under intensive vineyard cover cropping floor management systems"*. DeAnna will continue to work with Dr. Wolf in a research technical position for a few months but is ultimately seeking a winery/vineyard position to gain some industry experience. Congratulations De!

Scott Lowman successfully defended his PhD dissertation entitled *"Utilizing Beneficial Bacterial Endophytes to Promote Switchgrass Growth in Low-input Agricultural Production Systems"* under co-supervision of Drs. **Jerzy Nowak** (Chair) and **Chuansheng Mei** (Co-Chair). Congratulations Scott!

VCE Master Gardener Program strategic planning session: by **Dave Close**.

In early December 2013, a group of Extension Specialists, Agents, and Master Gardener Volunteers met in Charlottesville for one and a half days to engage in a Strategic Planning retreat, the first in over a decade, if not ever. Participants represented all four Extension Districts and included people from both rural and urban programs. A hired consultant facilitated the sessions on both days of planning.



We incorporated the comments that were collected during the late summer Leadership Development Planning sessions and by survey. By the end of the process, we had clearly defined the vision, mission, and core values of the Extension Master Gardener program. We also identified three core areas for which to focus our efforts for the next 12-18 months. We will continue to work on clarifying the objectives of our program and implementing the things we believe are priority as a result of the planning efforts.

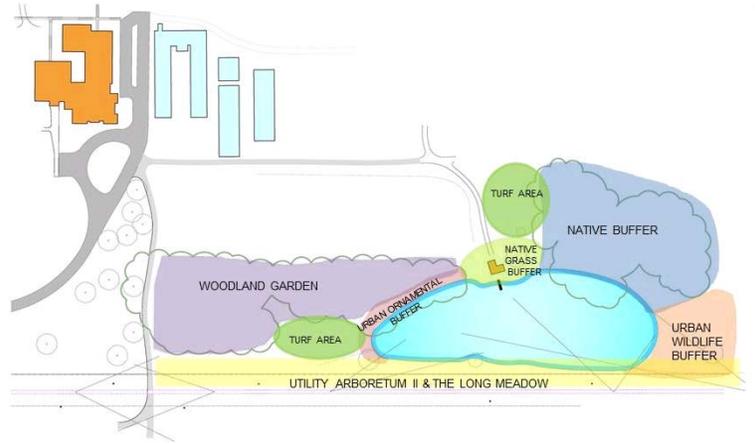
Bonnie Appleton Memorial Fund - From the newsletter of the Mid-Atlantic chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture. "Consider a tax deductible donation to support the newly established Bonnie Appleton Memorial Fund. The fund has raised over \$30,000 so far. We need to raise \$100,000 to endow the fund so that college scholarships can be awarded." Please call the ISA office at 703-753-0499 for more information.

Jeb Fields, PhD student working with **Jim Owen**, recently placed 2nd in the Warren S. Barham, PhD student oral presentation competition at Southern Region American Society for Horticultural Science in Dallas. Jeb received a commemorative plaque and a \$200 prize. His presentation was titled "*Comparison of Methodologies to Determine Hydrophysical Properties of Soilless Substrates.*" Congratulations Jeb!

Jayesh Samtani and Hannah J. Burrack recently received a grant from The Southern Region Small Fruit Consortium to support their work with strawberries. The title of their proposal was "Assessing the impact of strawberry clipper in annual strawberry production". Congratulations Jayesh!

Jayesh Samtani and Roy Flanagan III, ANR-Extension Agent, City of Virginia Beach, organized and recently held the Virginia Beach Strawberry Field Walk, School and Trade Show. **Allen Straw**, several other state specialists, and an out-of-state specialist from NCSU, talked on several topics and issues pertaining to strawberries over these two days.

New garden at the Hampton Roads AREC. The Buffer Demonstration Garden surrounds the AREC's stormwater/irrigation pond and is almost complete (5 years with 15 phases). It includes 7 different styles of buffer gardens with a trail and interpretational signage.



Greg Welbaum recently attended the Pacific Orchid Exhibition in San Francisco. Greg and **Barry Flinn** are interested in finding and propagating a "Hokie" orchid with orange and burgundy flowers.



European Beech *Fagus sylvatica*



Free! Learn at Lunch: Walks and Talks at the Hahn Horticulture Garden

All from noon to 1:00 p.m. on selected Wednesdays as noted. All talks meet at the Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion. No charge! Parking pass required for our visitor lot. Check our website for additional Learn at Lunch talks as they're added. Please check our website for program updates www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events

Abundant Mini Gardens: Introduction to Growing Abundant Fruit and Year-Round Vegetables in Small Raised Garden Beds - Debra Graff Debra Graff is an organic gardener with over 30 years of experience in growing food in raised garden beds. Wed. March. 19 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

- Harvest 2-6 pounds of vegetables per square foot of garden bed per year
- Design and grow a mini fruit garden—including tiny 4-6 foot high fruit trees
- Harvest fresh vegetables 12 months a year using simple cold frames
- Save hundreds of dollars on your grocery bill

Common Diseases of Vegetable Crops with Elizabeth Bush, Plant Disease Clinic at Virginia Tech

Elizabeth will discuss identification, prevention, and treatment of common diseases found on vegetable crops. Wednesday April 2, 12:00—1:00 p.m.

Spring Seminars and Workshops

Join us for educational programs and special events this winter and spring. Become a Friend of the Garden and enjoy our member discounts! (please visit our web site for membership form). Most programs are held at the Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion; pre-registration is required. Workshops and seminars are described in more detail, along with speaker bios, on our web page www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events.

Garden Flow with Karen Rexrode Saturday March 29, 10:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m. \$15 Friends of the Garden/\$20 general public

Have you ever wondered how a garden can seem to fit around a home, like the perfect piece in a puzzle? When the house and landscape flow together, you feel very comfortable in that space. For many years Karen has found this concept intriguing. Questions arise, is it a personal thing?, a naturalistic thing?, a lack of mastery or someone's great attention to detail? After years of studying the concept, Karen has come up with some thoughts on the art of garden flow. She ties the movement and visual queues into a lecture that will help you understand what makes a person feel comfortable in your garden.

Fruit Tree Grafting Workshop with Barry Robinson Saturday, May 3, 9:00 a.m.—11:30 a.m. \$15 ; pre-registration is required by contacting Smithfield at 540-231-3947

Join Historic Smithfield Plantation and the Hahn Horticulture Garden for grafting class. Horticulturist Barry Robinson will lead the hands-on workshop through the science of fruit tree grafting. Heritage scionwood from the orchards at Smithfield Plantation will be used. Students will be able to take home (4) grafted rootstocks.

Hypertufa Workshop with Lisa and Velva Saturday May 10th from 9 - 12noon. \$30 Friends of the Garden/\$35 general public: maximum of 20 people; pre-registration required.

Horticulturists Lisa Lipsey, and Velva Groover will lead this fun hands-on workshop. Hypertufa is a mix of components that creates a durable, porous material that is favorable for plant growth. Participants will create a uniquely designed planting container to take home. This is a messy process, so wear old cloths or bring an apron. Please bring a pair of sturdy rubber gloves. We will supply the mold, materials, instruction, and fun. Feel free to bring materials to personalize your container with -small seashells, stones, etc.

This will be on the test!

