

# Department of Horticulture

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Dr. Roger Harris, Department Head

## September 2015

Greetings everyone! The new school year is in full swing and campus is full of all sorts of activity. The fall semester was launched in fine style at our department meeting last week. Three lucky students were given \$300 scholarships and all attendees walked away with a new VT Horticulture T-shirt. The big news, however, was the long anticipated bloom of Stinky Phil, our *Amorphophallus titanum*, or “Corpse Flower” up at the greenhouse complex. This very rare plant last bloomed 10 years ago and social media was buzzing all over the country. Stay tuned for a time lapse series of photographs. Please see below for more on Stinky Phil! If you haven’t been to the Hahn Horticulture Garden recently please stop by to see what else is blooming. The Garden web site is recently overhauled with much improved navigation and beautiful pictures to boot. This is the place to keep updated on events and what is blooming this month. Check it out at <http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/>. The development of the new School of Plant and Environmental Sciences is proceeding, with committees still meeting to determine the best structure for the school and how to implement the reorganization. See <http://news.cals.vt.edu/spes/> for more information. Comments concerning the school can be made by clicking on the link within the “We Want Your Feedback” section on the left sidebar. I hope you enjoy this first e-newsletter of the new academic year. Please pass it on!



- With kind regards, *Reget*

### Welcome New Graduate Students!

MIKE GRAHAM (Ph.D.) – Megan O’Rourke

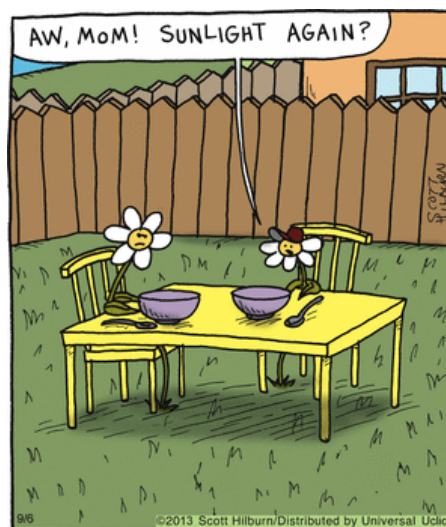
THOMAS HASING (Ph.D.) – Aure Bombarely

ZHIBO WANG (Ph.D.) – Bingyu Zhao

BRYCEN HILL (M.S.) – Tony Wolf

TRAVIS HIGGENBOTHM (M.S.) – Joyce Latimer

TESSA SKIFF (M.S.) – Greg Welbaum



## Welcome Dr. Samarah

Dr. Nezar Samarah from the University of Jordan in Amman will be visiting our department on sabbatical for one year beginning this week. His visit is funded by a grant from the Arab League. Greg Welbaum is hosting professor Samarah and he will be studying effects of nanochitin treatment on plant growth development.

## In the News

What's that smell!!! It's stinky Phil blooming at the greenhouses! He opened completely Friday evening and accepted thousands of visitors over this past weekend. He will be accepting visitors this week 8am to 4pm until he has closed up.

A collection of news stories about this event:

- <http://wfirnews.com/local-news/rare-foul-smelling-at-virginia-tech-this-week>
- <http://www.wdbj7.com/video/corpse-flower-about-to-bloom-at-virginia-tech/34853164>
- <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2015/08/082115-cals-corpseflower.html>
- [http://www.collegiatetimes.com/news/hokies-hold-their-breath-for-stinky-phil-s-blossoming/article\\_9fb288d2-4ab2-11e5-83d3-ab35ebcd8de4.html](http://www.collegiatetimes.com/news/hokies-hold-their-breath-for-stinky-phil-s-blossoming/article_9fb288d2-4ab2-11e5-83d3-ab35ebcd8de4.html)



Stinky Phil's proud father, Jeff Burr!



Left: the line to see Stinky Phil this past Sunday! Right: in full bloom!

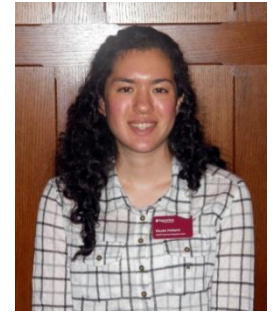
## Sustainable SITES Initiative™

Virginia Tech News story about Susan Day's participation in the Sustainable Sites Initiative, a comprehensive program and toolkit for developing sustainable landscapes. [Urban forestry professor instrumental in establishment of new national rating program for sustainable landscapes.](#)



## Undergraduate News

Virginia Tech Biological Sciences major, Nicole Holland, completed a MAOP (Minorities Academic Opportunities Program) internship in the Veilleux lab, working on a potato genomics project. She presented the results of her work, "Holland N, Veilleux RE, Holt SH, Copy number variation and the advancement of a diploid inbred potato" at the MAOP Symposium, held July 31, 2015 on the Blacksburg campus.



Nicole Holland

Congratulations to Bobby Nance, named a [2015 HortScholar by AmericanHort](#). The HortScholars program aims to expose students to various facets of the floriculture industry they would not typically experience as part of their regular academic coursework. He attended [Cultivate'15](#) this past July in Ohio.

## Graduate Student News

Sanghamitra Das, PhD student with Jayesh Samtani, was awarded the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Graduate student grant for her proposed work titled "Non chemical methods of weed control in strawberry annual plasticulture production". She will be receiving \$11,000 for her project for the current academic year. SSARE typically funds about 8 proposals each year.



Jeb Fields (PhD candidate), Jake Shreckhise (PhD student), Simon McPherson (post-baccalaureate) and Nate Ferraro (MS Ag Econ) presented their papers at the Bryson L. James Student Research Competition, held in conjunction with the 2015 Southern Nursery Association Research Conference. Jake and Jeb were awarded 2nd and 3rd place in the PhD student competition. In addition, Rachel Mack (MS student) and Jeb Fields were awarded the Sidney B. Meadows Scholarship. Congratulations!



## Conferences

Richard Veilleux presented a talk at the 99<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Potato Association of America in Portland, Maine last July (Veilleux RE, Upham KT, Laimbeer FPE, Douches DS, Coombs J, SNP chip analysis of monoplastoids reveals genomic differences).

Joyce Latimer and Mara Grossman (PhD candidate) attended the 42<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting of the Plant Growth Regulation Society of America, in Kona, Hawaii, in July as part of a joint meeting with the Plant Growth Substance Special Committee in the Chinese Society of Plant Biology. Joyce presented an invited talk and both presented posters at the meeting.

Joyce Latimer and Dave Close, along with other VCE faculty, attended the Southern Region Local and Regional Foods Systems Working Meeting in Crystal City, August 11-13. The goal of the meeting was to explore opportunities for cross-discipline/multi-state initiatives to increase our capacity for strengthening food systems in the South.

## Publications

Lowman, S Kim-Dura, C Mei, J Nowak. 2015. [Strategies for enhancement of switchgrass \(\*Panicum virgatum\* L.\) performance under limited nitrogen supply based on utilization of N-fixing bacterial endophytes](#) Plant and Soil, online 21 August 2015.

Hu G, Liu Y, Zhang X, Yao F, Huang Y, Ervin EH, et al. (2015) Physiological Evaluation of Alkali-Salt Tolerance of Thirty Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) Lines. PLoS ONE 10(7): e0125305. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0125305 <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0125305>

Jia, X., **B. Chanda**, **M. Zhao**, A. Brunner, E. Beers (2015) Instability of the Arabidopsis mutant *csn5a-2* caused by epigenetic modification of intronic T-DNA. Plant Sci. In press.

Jervis J., S. Hildreth, X. Sheng, E. Beers, A. Brunner, R. Helm. (2015) A metabolomic assessment of **NAC154** transcription factor overexpression in field grown poplar stem wood. Phytochemistry. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0031942215000795>

Liu L., M. Zinkgraf, E. Petzold, E. Beers, V. Filkov, A. Groover. (2014) The **Populus** ARBORKNOX1 homeodomain transcription factor regulates woody growth through binding to evolutionarily conserved target genes of diverse function. New Phytol. 205: 682-94. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/nph.13151/abstract>

## Hahn Horticulture Garden

Over 300 guests visited the gardens for the opening of the Simply Elemental sculpture exhibition. The art will be on display until September 30<sup>th</sup>. [Map of exhibit](#).

[New HHG timelapse video of plants in the garden!](#) The footage was taken during the garden's blooming peak this past spring by Zeke Barlow, Director of Communications for CALS.

The Garden's website has been updated by Sarah Gugercin. A special thanks to everyone that contributed and/or reviewed the website!



Diane Relf with Steve the Steampunk Steer.

A screenshot of the Hahn Horticulture Garden website. The header features the Virginia Tech logo and navigation links: HOME, EXPLORE, ABOUT, EDUCATION, FACILITY RENTAL, GET INVOLVED. The main content area is titled "Hahn Horticulture Garden" and includes a "Welcome to the Hahn Horticulture Garden!" section, "Upcoming Events" (listing Junior Master Gardener Program, Butterfly walk, Monarch Migration and Tagging, Art in the Garden, and Outdoor Art Exhibit), and "From the blog" (listing articles about the August blooming, a timelapse video, and the Simply Elemental Art Exhibition). The footer mentions "More events" and "The 11th Annual Garden Gala".



## Memorial

Alan Robert McDaniel, 66, of Blacksburg, died Monday, July 20, 2015, at Lewis Gale Hospital-Montgomery. He was born in Atlantic, Iowa, on November 5, 1948. Alan received his Bachelor of Science from Iowa State in 1970 and PhD from University of Tennessee in 1975. He was an Associate Professor of Horticulture and coordinating advisor for undergraduate students at Virginia Tech for 37 years and taught Floral Design. He also served as faculty advisor to the Virginia Tech Honor System. Alan served his community as chair of the State and National FFA nursery landscape contest, volunteered time teach Master Gardeners, serves as Master of Ceremonies to the Miss Newport Pageant, and played percussion for the Blacksburg Community Band.