

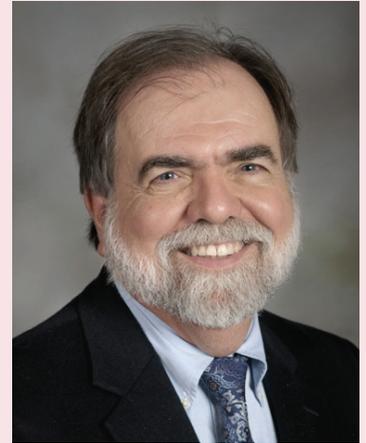
# Department of Horticulture

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Dr. Roger Harris, Department Head

## March 2016

Greetings everyone! The end of February brings the first signs of spring on campus, and that first sign is the annual anticipation of spring break! In addition, crocus flowers are suddenly in full display and we expect our other favorite spring flowers to show up very soon. This edition of our e-newsletter showcases our award winning students and faculty. We have wonderful teachers and I am very happy to announce that Alex Niemiera will be receiving the university Wine Award for sustained teaching excellence and that Susan Day will be receiving a Certificate of Teaching Excellence from our college (see below). In last month's e-newsletter we announced that Dave Close will be receiving the University Alumni Award for Excellence in Extension. Brycen Hill and Jeb Stuart recently received first and second places in the joint CSES/HORT graduate student research symposium and Rich Rodrigues has been selected as the VT graduate student of the year by the graduate school. We have a culture of engagement in our undergraduate program (see feature on Hort club) and we believe in hands-on learning (see feature on Sustainable Agriculture Practicum class). Our undergraduate students will soon be traveling to Mississippi State University for the National Collegiate Landscape competition and career fair. We are very grateful for our sponsors who make this great event possible. Stay tuned for results. Come celebrate horticulture with us this June 11th at the annual Garden Gala! I hope that you enjoy this edition of our monthly e-newsletter. Please pass it on! — Roger



### Welcome!

Gina Angelella has joined Megan O'Rourke's program as a post-doc researcher. As a recent PhD graduate from Purdue University, she will be working on a USDA funded grant to look at the benefits of pollinator habitats for vegetable farmers. Gina is located out on the Eastern Shore and collaborates with Ramon Arancibia at the Painter AREC. She enjoys agroecology and plant-insect interactions; especially interested in land-usage effects at the local and landscape scales on plant-insect interactions and management practices in sustainable systems.



*Horticulture Club students at the Agriculture Community Day where they partnered with the high school students to teach middle school students about Horticulture.*

## National Collegiate Landscape Competition March 15-19th

The four year Horticulture students and the two year Agricultural Technology students are headed to Mississippi State University for the annual National Collegiate Landscape Competition. (formerly PLANET) The group of 21 students and their leaders, Barbara Leshyn, John James and Tom Martin will be taking a bus down to Mississippi State with a stop at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens in Alabama.

We would like to thank all our sponsors; Grigg Design, Southern Landscape Group, Williams Brothers Tree and Lawn Service, Ruppert Landscape, Arborscapes, Tidewater Landworks, Bartlett Tree Experts, Heritage Landscape Services, Hidden Lane Residential Landscapes, VNLA, Mickey Hayes, Pavli Mykerezi and Roger Harris. Without the financial support of our donors, many students would not have the opportunity to attend the competition and career fair.

We also would like to thank Southern Landscape Group for sending Matt Cox and April Sigmon down to campus for a day. Matt and April, former PLANET attendees and VT Horticulture students, spent a day with this year's competitors. They worked with students giving them the inside view of what the competition will look like. Matt and April educated the students on a variety of events,

## Undergraduate Student News

Emma Buchanan and Rose Yim are joining Amber Vallotton as part of the Fresh Produce Food Safety Team. Emma is a Junior at Virginia Tech double majoring in Finance and Public and Urban Affairs. Rose is a Food Science & Technology Major with a Business Minor. They will be assisting Amber and the project team on the Extension outreach part of a USDA NIFA project as well as running all of the communications on social media.

Rachael White was accepted into the UGA – Cortona Study Abroad Program: Viticulture and Enology. They will be traveling to different vineyards, in the heart of Tuscany, Italy, looking at different styles of wine and the different ways that Italians are growing them.



*Horticulture Hokies preparing for the 2016 NCLC!*

explaining what to expect and even providing hands on experiences so this year's group had a feel of how their events will be held.

Barbara, John, Tom and the students are continuously grateful for all the support from industry and alumni. You make this trip possible. We will keep you posted on how we do. GO HOKIES!

## Awards

Alex Niemiera will be receiving the university Wine Award for Teaching Excellence. This is Virginia Tech's most prestigious award for sustained teaching excellence. This award confirms what we all know -Alex is a fantastic teacher and a dedicated friend of education! Congratulations Alex and many thanks to our awards committee for putting together the nomination.

Susan Day will receive a Certificate of Teaching Excellence from CALS. The nomination letter noted that "all of her courses require students to have a full appreciation and grasp of science-based concepts as provided by the scientific literature. She also implements the Hands On, Minds On philosophy in which students are challenged to make inquiries into the subject matter, to grasp a project in a real-world fashion, and to stretch their intellect to come to solutions. Such an approach has long lasting and meaningful pedagogical results."

## Outreach and Talks

Laurie Fox has joined the VNLA board as an educational advisor working specifically with the Virginia Certified Horticulturist program. VNLA plans for the program include updating the training manual, adding to the on-line support resources, and working on standardizing the review classes across the state.

On February 23rd, Megan O'Rourke and Ramon Arancibia gave extension presentations at the Fauquier County 2016 Winter Vegetable School about cover crops and sweet potato production.

On February 18, Megan O'Rourke was invited to Purdue University to present a guest seminar to the Entomology Department entitled, "Sustainable intensification in pest management: progress or paradox?"



*Brycen and Jeb with their awards at the joint CSES/HORT Graduate Student Research Symposium.*



## Grant

Ramon Arancibia received a SSARE R&E Grant to strengthen the sustainability of rural and urban farmers to grow vegetables year round by investigating and sharing the full benefits of integrating row covers into sustainable production systems to improve production year round. Congratulations Ramon!

## Graduate Student News

Richard Rodrigues has been selected by the Graduate School for the Graduate Student of the Year Award! On top of that, he also received 1st place for his talk at the 2016 Translational Plant Science Mini-symposium! Congratulations Richard!

Brycen Hill and Jeb Fields placed 1st and 2nd, respectively, in the joint CSES/HORT Graduate Student Research Symposium.

Liza Dobson, had a paper accepted at Southern Anthropological Society's Annual Conference. Her presentation is titled, "Developing Cultural Context and Recognizing the Civic Professional: A Study of Home Gardening and Food Security in Rural Appalachia"

Liza also co-presented a poster called Realizing Value: An Extension of Experiential Learning Design at the Conference on Higher Education Pedagogy.

On February 11th Rachel Seman-Varner (PhD student) co-presented a workshop titled "Strategies for developing systems thinking" at the Conference on Higher Education Pedagogy at VT. It was standing room only and a very productive workshop.

## Travel

To kick off a USAID funded program that tackles pest management problems in SE Asia vegetable production, Megan O'Rourke and a team of scientists from VT, Penn State, and Ohio State traveled to Cambodia, Bangladesh, and Nepal to begin a four year collaborative research project. Scientists will conduct research to tackle production problems, provide trainings in integrated pest management, and will mentor graduate students from these countries.

For the past few weeks, Susan Day has been visiting the Green Infrastructure Research Group (<http://thegirg.org/>) at the University of Melbourne in Australia. She gave a keynote talk at the 2nd International Urban Tree Diversity Conference held in Melbourne and is staying on briefly to work with urban ecologist Stephen Livesley and his graduate students. Susan will also present a seminar, "Trees, Storm Water, & City Hall—Challenges linking research and practice under a U.S. policy framework" to both faculty and city government.

## In the News

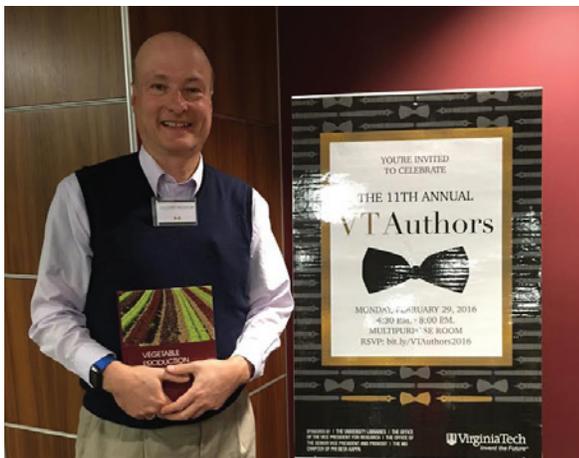
Susan Day's Soil Profile Rebuilding research was featured in VT News. Over seven years of research showed that trees planted in rehabilitated soil have as much as **84 percent** greater canopy than those in untreated soil. Unlike many previous approaches to alleviating soil compaction, the effects of Soil Profile Rebuilding persist because the technique doesn't just break up the soil physically; it also affects biological activity in the soil. Read the entire article here: <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2016/02/021616-cnre-soilrehabilitation.html>



Scientists from Virginia Tech (Megan O'Rourke, Maria-Elisa Christie, and George Norton) discuss eggplant production concerns in Siem Reap, Cambodia.



(Left) Inspecting *Acer campestre* using stormwater for irrigation. (Right) Very fancy yarn-bombed trees in Melbourne.



Greg Welbaum with his *Vegetable Production* book at the VT Authors Recognition 2016.

## Publications

Khandaker MS , Dudek DM , Beers EP , Dillard DA , Bevan DR. 2016. Molecular modeling of the elastomeric properties of repeating units and building blocks of resilin, a disordered elastic protein. *Journal of the Mechanical Behavior of Biomedical Materials* 61:110-121.

Layman, R.L., S.D. Day, D.K. Mitchell, Y. Chen, J.R. Harris, and W.L. Daniels. 2016. Below ground matters: Urban soil rehabilitation increases tree canopy and speeds establishment. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*. 16:25-35.



*The Horticulture crew at the VCE Winter Conference.*

## Virginia Cooperative Extension Winter Conference Poster Competition

Congratulations to the Horticulture faculty and alumni who placed at the VCE Winter Conference Poster Competition!

The Agent/Specialist Partnership poster category was completely taken by Horticulture! Holly Scoggins and colleagues won 1st place, Amber Vallotton and a colleagues won 2nd place, and Ramon Arancibia and colleagues won 3rd place!

Katy [Thorne] Overby (HORT '08) won 1st place in the Interdisciplinary poster category.

## Dining Services Horticulture Farm Update

Students in the Sustainable Agriculture Practicum course helped make 2015 the most productive season at the Dining Services Horticulture Farm yet. Together, we harvested roughly 48,000 pounds of fresh produce, all served to students, staff, and faculty at Virginia Tech's award-winning dining halls. A 2015 crop highlight: more than 600 pounds of basil harvested and processed into pesto! Changes and improvements to the farm should make 2016 an exciting learning experience for students in the Practicum. This spring, we will propagate thousands of rosemary, thyme, oregano, and sage plants for a new perennial herb installation. New varieties of purple and yellow fingerling potatoes will go in the ground mid-April. Students will help upgrade the vegetable washing shed, soon to include a new walk-in cooler, in our effort to adopt GAP (Good Agriculture Practice) standards that foster food-safety on the farm. Horticulture graduates with hands-on experience on sustainable farms will serve valuable roles as professionals in the growing sustainable food and agriculture movement.



*Students with their fall harvest.*

## Hahn Horticulture Garden Events

Announcing the 12th annual Garden Gala at the Hahn!

It is THE best garden party in Virginia and we want to invite you to join us. The Gala starts at 5:30 and ends at 9:00 p.m. on **Saturday, June 11, 2016**.

Learn at Lunch 12-1pm at the Hahn Pavilion

- March 16 Rebekah Paulson Stadium Woods
- March 30 Robert McDuffie Gardens of Japan

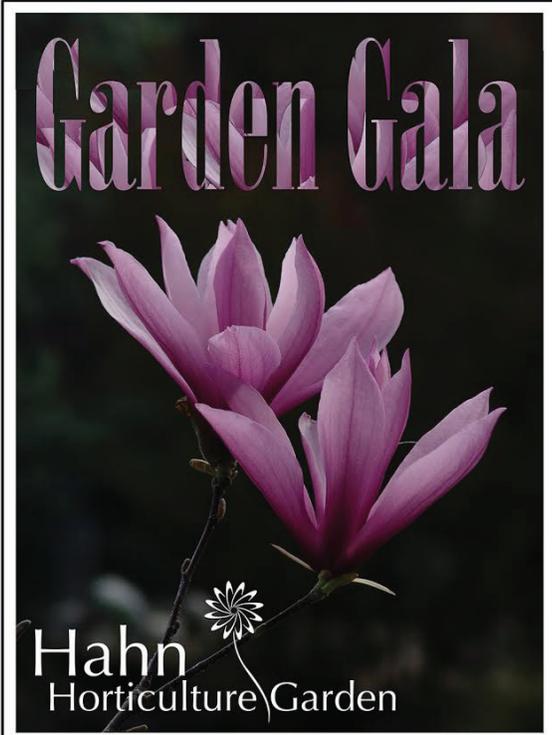
April 15 -17 HHG Field Trip: Asheville Garden Tour!

\$500/\$475 (members) per person for double occupancy.

Registration deadline March 25, 2016. For more information, visit <http://www.mcduff.hort.vt.edu/Asheville2016/Index.html>

*Learn about other HHG events at:*

<http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events.html>



**Garden Gala**

Hahn Horticulture Garden

**JUNE 11, 2016!**

[\*\*www.hort.vt.edu/hhg\*\*](http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg)

This event is sponsored by the Hahn Garden and the Horticulture Club of Virginia.