

# Garden Leaflet

Newsletter for the Hahn Horticulture Garden at Virginia Tech

Vol 9/1

SPRING 2011

## HHG Hosts Plant Explorer and Nurseryman Dan Hinkley

Holly Scoggins, HHG Director

Part of the Hahn Horticulture Garden's educational mission is to bring top-notch, nationally-known speakers to our campus and community, and we hit the ball out of the park on this one. An audience of 90+ turned out to hear "The Plant Explorer's Garden" by Dan Hinkley on February 24 in the gorgeous Virginia Bioinformatics Institute auditorium. Dan is an award-winning plant explorer, author, horticulturist, and all-around great guy (not to mention he's been on the Martha Stewart show about 15 times).

Dan's beautiful and fascinating multi-media presentation covered his days founding Heronswood nursery near Seattle, his subsequent move to his new garden aptly named "Windcliff", and a plant-lust-inducing travelogue of his botanizing trips around the world. In the course of an hour, we were transported to remote mountains and lush valleys in China, Vietnam, New Zealand, Chile, and more. Video clips artfully inserted in the talk brought another dimension - the sight and sounds of wind in bamboo forests, the call of birds on Puget Sound, and the grossness of leeches in his socks after a jungle hike. We laughed, we sighed, we drooled over fabulous plants. And then the lights came on. Thanks for the adventure, Dan!



Holly wasn't excited in the least to finally meet her horticulture hero.

## The First Day of Spring – Some of our Favorite Plants at the HHG



From left to right: **Photo 1.** Our white form of *Magnolia x soulangiana*, Saucer Magnolia. **Photo 2.** Subtle green flowers of *Helleborus foetidus* – the Bearsfoot Hellebore. A true "workhorse" perennial. **Photo 3.** A flock of the appropriately-named Glory-of-the-snow (*Chionodoxa forbesii*). **Photo 4.** One of the early, wee bulbs - *Puschkinia scilloides* var. *libanotica*. **Photo 5.** Clusters of winter hazel flowers hang like golden grapes (*Corylopsis glabrescens*).



photos by H.L. Scoggins

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### Wednesday Garden Walks:

**Free! 12:00 - 1:00pm**  
(meet at the HHG Pavilion)

**April 13**  
"Spring Bulbs"  
Walk with Dr. Holly Scoggins

**May 11**  
"Spring Flowering Trees and Shrubs"  
walk with Dr. Alex Niemiera

### Dates to Save:

- April 28, 29, 30** - Plant Sale
- May 6** - National Public Gardens Day
- June 11** - "Lucky 7" Garden Gala
- August 27** - The Wicked Garden

  
**Hahn** at **Virginia Tech**  
**Horticulture**  
**Garden**

## Spring Workshops & Seminar Series

**Spring Wildflower Walk** with Dr. Holly Scoggins  
Saturday, April 23, 2011 9:00-11:00am

Last year's hike was so much fun, we're doing it again! Trillium, jacks, bloodroot, columbine, bluebells, ferns...you'll be amazed at the diversity of species right here in Montgomery County. Holly channels her inner nature-show-host; you bring your camera! Register now as class size is very limited. Location will be revealed to registrants only.

Register for the above event by calling Stephanie at 540-231-5970 or visit our website for more information.  
<http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events>

**Rain Barrel Workshop**  
Saturday, May 7, 2011 10:00am – 12:00pm

Interested in making your own rain barrel? Join the Community Design Assistance Center (CDAC) at the Hahn Horticulture Garden on Saturday May 7th, 2011. Participants will learn about watersheds, conservation and low impact development measures, and take their own rain barrel home with them!

\$60/barrel (Cash or check only; payable at the door the day of the workshop). All required assembly materials will be provided. Preregistration is encouraged. **To download a registration form or find out more information about this or other upcoming workshops, visit: <http://cdac.arch.vt.edu/RainBarrels.htm>**

# Save the Date

and Come Get Your Green On!

**VT Hort Club and Hahn Horticulture Garden**  
**Annual Plant Sale: April 28,29,30**  
**8:00am - 6:00pm**

**American Public Garden Association**  
**Sponsors Third Annual National Public**  
**Gardens Day: Friday, May 6, 2011**

The Hahn Horticulture Garden is planning an **open house** on May 6th and other events to help celebrate the important role of America's public gardens. Not only do our public gardens help to promote and inspire environmental stewardship, but they also serve as great educational tools and are a crucial means of conserving plant life and water in our communities. Please visit [www.publicgardens.org](http://www.publicgardens.org) for more information about this great event and [www.hort.vt.edu/hhg](http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg) for the HHG open house.



## Beauty of the Season: A Retrospective

Dabney Blanton, Horticulturist, Hahn Horticulture Garden



*Rudbeckia maxima*

photo by D. Blanton

I must admit, the fast, harsh arrival of winter was really difficult for me this year. One moment I was raking leaves and planting bulbs, and then all of a sudden, the garden was frozen through and through and the unkind Blacksburg wind making any outside work totally miserable. I felt like a tropical annual hit by the first hard frost, brown and mushy, and totally incapable of surviving through the unforgiving winter to come. I

existed in this brown, mushy state for a few weeks before any sort of hardening-off occurred. Now, after the craziness of the holidays, more snow, and constant blistering wind, I am starting to feel prepared to deal with what Mother Nature has to offer these next few months. And what's even more, I am enjoying it! I had the privilege to walk through the Garden on a clear, cold, solitary day after Christmas with my camera, and was stricken by the beauty of what remains standing in the garden. Specifically, my eye honed in on the perennial skeletons of our spring/summer/fall friends whose beauty is just as intense in the winter. Our winter garden would be downright barren without the presence of the many ornamental grasses here; switch grass, little bluestem, and prairie dropseed to name a few.

The patch of *Heuchera villosa* 'Autumn Bride' on the corner slope of the pine knoll in the meadow provides a fantastic display of its coppery-brown, wind-blown panicles. Spilling out into the buffalo grass is the lovely *Eryngium yuccafolium* with its dark-brown, globose inflorescences climbing along and atop their thickish, round stems. And, just behind it are the tall, white stems of *Rudbeckia maxima* contrasting so beautifully with a clear blue winter's sky. I even think some plants look better this time of year than any other. I was totally surprised to find *Monarda* a winter stunner! I cut back a lot of it throughout the growing season because of powdery mildew and what I thought to be general boringness after blooming; but, thankfully, I missed one and it remains lovely and vertical, topped with many perfect little orbs. And those are just a few examples. The entire Garden is replete with sexy bark, stunning silhouettes, bronzing evergreens, fuzzy buds, a delightfully frozen waterfall, and much, much more. So, grab your snow boots, maybe a camera, and a keen eye, and enjoy the austere beauty this season has to offer. ☂



## More JMG Fun!

Stephanie Huckestein  
Education & Outreach Coordinator

**D**ue to the great success of the Junior Master Gardener summer camp, the Hahn Horticulture Garden and Montgomery County 4-H are teaming up to offer a Junior Master Gardener Club starting this spring. Montgomery County 4-H Agent, Michelle Dickerson, former 4-H Extension Specialist, Joe Hunnings, and I (Stephanie Huckestein, Education & Outreach Coordinator) are organizing the 4-H JMG Club at the Hahn Horticulture Garden. Club participants will have the opportunity to become certified Junior Master

**We will offer the Junior Master Gardener Summer Camp again this summer the week of July 11-15th!**

Gardeners through hands-on learning, community service, and leadership projects. Kids will be encouraged to work towards JMG certification, though it is not a requirement to be involved in the club. To gain certification, participants must complete one individual activity and one group activity in each teaching concept of the JMG Level I curriculum. They must also complete one service/community project for each chapter. The curriculum is written for youth in grades 3-5 and covers topics that include Plant Growth and Development, Soils and Water, Ecology and Environmental Horticulture, Insects and Diseases, Landscape Horticulture, Fruits and Nuts, Vegetables and Herbs, and Life Skills and Career Exploration.

Club activities will be led by trained volunteers (including several Master Gardeners) with support from Hahn Horticulture Garden and Extension staff. We are so pleased with the enthusiasm of the JMG Volunteer Team. They are a very talented, knowledgeable, and fun group. Volunteers were required to attend 4 hours of training which included JMG training as well as risk management.

**The 4-H JMG Club at the Hahn Horticulture Garden will meet on Wednesday evenings from 6:30-8:30pm. The club is limited to 20 youth in grades 3-5. We will meet for 12 weeks in the spring with a second session in the fall.**

If you have or know of children in grades 3-5 who might be interested in joining future 4-H JMG Clubs at the Hahn Horticulture Garden, please contact Stephanie at vtgarden@vt.edu or 540-231-5970. Also contact me if you are interested in joining our JMG Volunteer Team. 🌱

## Announcing the Hildebrand Landscape Internship at the HHG

**M**ike Hildebrand (HORT ,74) and his wife Susie have been great fans and supporters of the HHG and the Horticulture Department for the past decade. Their latest efforts come in the form of student internship funding. A generous annual pledge from the Hildebrand's has allowed us to offer a new full-time garden internship to students interested in the area of public horticulture. Because Mike owns James River Nursery, Inc., a successful design/build firm and wholesale nursery in Ashland, Virginia, we've selected landscape maintenance and construction as the focus for this internship. **We're happy to announce that the internship for 2011 has been awarded to Horticulture Senior Jacob Chance of Woodstock, Virginia.** 🌱



## Coming August 27

### Down and Dirty Garden Symposium II:



Featuring **Amy Stewart**, author of *Flower Confidential*, *Wicked Plants*, and *Wicked Bugs*.

Also featuring **Paula Gross**, co-author with Larry Mellichamp of *Bizarre Botanicals: How to Grow String-of-Hearts, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Panda Ginger, and Other Weird and Wonderful Plants*.

Please check the HHG website in June for registration information.

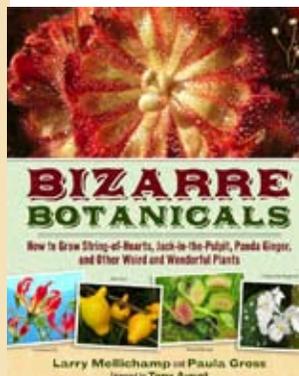


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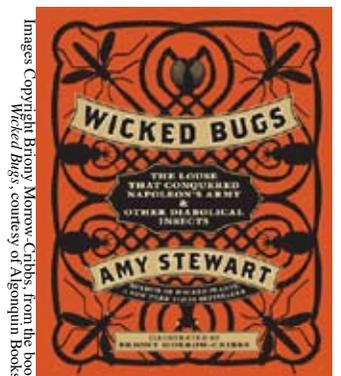


Image Copyright Bryony Morrow-Crabb, from the book Wicked Bugs, courtesy of Algonquin Books

## Spring Cleaning

### Early Spring Gardening Tips

Paul Chumbley, Horticulturist, Hahn Horticulture Garden

**E**arly April is a transition time for the garden; a little effort now will make spring even more enjoyable!

**Cut back** ornamental grasses before any new growth occurs. An easy method is to use a rope with a loop at one end. Wrap the rope around the base of the grass and run the rope through the loop. Now you have a lasso on it! After lifting the lasso 10-12 inches off the ground, have a friend pull the rope while you use a chain saw or hedge shear to cut the plant to a 4-8 inch height. This method keeps the grass bundled and saves much clean-up time. Be sure to wear gloves and long sleeve shirt to avoid small cuts and irritation to the skin.



**Prune** summer flowering shrubs like Buddleia, Spiraea and Abelia before new growth begins. Bigleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*), is an exception to the rule, as it blooms on old wood. It should be pruned in late summer after blooms fade. Shrub roses should be pruned late February to early March. Climbing

roses should be trained to an arbor or trellis but not pruned at this time. Prune them after blooming.

Now is an excellent time to **transplant** mature or established plants while they are still dormant. However, resist the temptation to dig in soil that is very wet to avoid soil compaction, ruining the soil structure.

Many garden beds still have leaves on them from the fall.

**Resist the temptation** to clean them up now as leaf litter makes an excellent mulch. Contrary to popular thought mulch does not keep soil warm, it keeps soil temperatures from fluctuating so greatly. Plants don't mind cold, it's the freeze-thaw cycles that are very disruptive to plant root systems and can heave them out of the ground.



Back to the **mulch**. A three- inch layer of mulch will suppress weeds and conserve moisture in the soil. Here at the Hahn Horticulture Garden, we use leaves from last fall that have been chopped up and composted over the winter. Plenty of it and the price is right! A pre-emergent herbicide can also help suppress weeds. Read all labels and directions to avoid application around plants that are susceptible to herbicide injury.

This is a great time to **clean, sharpen and repair** your garden tools. And finally, take care of the most important gardening tool, yourself. Before gardening make sure your muscles are warmed up and stretch to avoid injury. Be safe, and most importantly, **have fun!** 🌿



Lasso that grass, Paul and Dabney!

## 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Garden Gala

# Lucky 7!

June 11, 2011

5:30 - 9:00 pm

*Food, Drinks, Casino & Silent Auction*

Sponsorship information and ticket order form can be found on our website or by calling us at 540.231.5783

## Oh Deer. How to Keep Your Garden From Becoming a Midnight Feast

Paul Westervelt, Annual & Perennial Production Manager, Saunders Brothers, Inc.

**H**ave you ever planted a prize perennial just to find it munched to the ground a few days later? Or, worse still, watched a plant grow for years with no damage just to be munched once you're sure it's safe? If not, I suspect you're gardening on a balcony or lucky enough to live in an area with light deer pressure. Deer are a challenge to gardeners across the country, but especially in suburban areas where we restrict hunting, provide ample cover, eliminate predators (except mini vans), and offer an endless buffet for their eating pleasure.

Gardening with deer is challenging but doable. To succeed, you need a multi-faceted management approach that includes deer resistant plants, design, repellents, possibly fencing, and even herd management.

I like repellents because they're easy to apply, allow for spot treatment, and are relatively inexpensive. Most are applied topically and all employ deterring factors including taste, fear, pain, and conditioned avoidance. What's conditioned avoidance? Think tequila. I know several people who swore off tequila after one (or more) bad experiences. Now they associate tequila with that post party feeling technically called "post-ingestive consequences".

To be most effective, repellents should be applied before damage starts, temperatures should be above freezing and no rain in the immediate forecast. When planting something new in an area with deer pressure, treat it with a repellent immediately after planting. If a deer's first experience with a particular plant is unpleasant, it will be less likely to eat it in the future.

**My favorite repellent, for all its ridiculousness, is bar soap.**

Deer can become habituated to repellents if used for long periods, so rotating products is advised. Remember too, that repellents are not effective at protecting trees or shrubs from damage caused by bucks rubbing their antlers on them – fencing is the best option for those situations. Repellents encourage deer to eat something or someplace else, but that requires there be something else to eat...like your neighbor's hostas. A starving deer will likely eat anything regardless of the repellent. Still, repellents are a useful step between plant choice and fencing in many situations.

My favorite repellent, for its ridiculousness, is bar soap. It has been proven effective but only when hung every three feet around the edge of the plant you wish to protect. I imagine the protected tree or shrub looking a bit like the Easter egg trees that pop up in our area each spring.



"Hey, where's the Hostas?"

My second favorite repellent, for its unusualness, is baby formula – specifically formula containing the protein casein hydrolysate. Why do proteins work? The current thought is they may indicate the presence of harmful microbes that cause post-ingestive consequences for strict herbivores.

With dozens of repellents on the market, how do you choose? Talking to your gardening neighbors and local independent retailer is a good first step, but anecdotal info can be unreliable. We need a thorough scientific study and we're in luck! The USDA published just such a trial summary in 2001. It's full of fun graphs that illustrate the effectiveness and duration of protection afforded by fifteen different repellents with various modes of action. They found overwhelmingly that protein based repellents were most effective. To read the full report (it's short), refer to the USDA's Comparison of Commercial Deer Repellents available free online.

For those of you who despise monthly reapplication, a researcher at the University of Minnesota Duluth recently discovered a way to get capsaicin, the natural compound that makes peppers hot, into a plant systemically making it unpalatable. The product has been submitted to the EPA for registration so keep your eyes peeled.

One important thing to know about repellents is their effectiveness is judged by *reduced* deer browse, not its elimination. If your goal is the complete and permanent elimination of browsing damage in the garden, fencing is your only option.

For a good book on successfully gardening with deer, check out Neil Soderstrom's *Deer-Resistant Gardening*. It's a great compilation of recent research, has the most thorough deer resistant plant list I've seen, and contains good info on combating other garden pests as well. 🐘

The pruning methods of deer are a little different from most gardeners



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

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Woody Plant Curator: Dr. Alex Niemiera

Dept. Head, Horticulture: Dr. Roger Harris

Garden Leaflet design: Nancy Jurek

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## Notes from the Director

The wee bulbs are up – crocus, snow drops, winter aconite – the sure sign that spring is here, no turning back! We always look forward to spring, but it was a darn good autumn and winter for the Hahn Horticulture Garden. Terrific speakers and programs, some much-needed support in the form of the Hildebrand internship, lots of exciting progress by Stephanie on the Junior Master Gardener program. Looking forward, we have more excellent speakers scheduled, the plant sale's on the way, and Gala plans are progressing.

Regarding the new look and expanded content of the newsletter.... I'm so pleased to have the able assistance of Nancy Jurek. Her graphics and editing know-how will help us build a more polished and effective presence in print, on the web, and in social media. I've chugged along at these endeavors for the past eight years, and welcome her creativity and fresh perspective.

Since the primary mission of the Hahn Horticulture Garden is education, we're trying to get more gardening-related content into the newsletter. The issue's spring gardening tips from Hahn Horticulturist Paul Chumbley and the guest article on deer by Hort grad, garden supporter, and super plant guy Paul Westervelt are steps in that direction. A new e-Newsletter is also in the works to bring you more frequent updates, ideas, updates, and plants we love. I hope you enjoy this season's newsletter.

Happy spring and happy gardening, wherever you may be!  
Dr. Holly Scoggins



Holly channels Sally Rand at Plant Delights Nursery in Raleigh, NC.  
(*Colocasia gigantea* 'Thailand Giant')

photo by P. Westervelt

