

Volume 5, Issue 3. "If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant." - Anne Bradstreet

Inside:

Got bark? *Stewartia monadelpha*.....p. 3

Notes from the Director.....p. 4

New in the Garden Gift Shop: Our very own "Gardener's Hand Therapy" whipped soy hand cream! The fine folks at Crooked Mile Candle Company just up the road in Newport, Va., made a Horticulture Garden-worthy cream in exclusive scents just for us — Lemongrass and Garden Refresh*mint— both fragrances are suitable for men or women.. \$7.00 for 4 soothing ounces. Drop by the Pavilion the next time you're at the garden— we have T-shirts and flower-pot coffee mugs, too!

SAVE the DATE!

Spring Plant Sale in conjunction with the Horticulture Club April 27, 28, and 29.

3rd Annual Garden Gala June 16, 2007

www.hort.vt.edu/hhg

Winter Seminar Series

What do **Felder Rushing, Rick Darke, Todd Lasseigne, and Paul James** have in common? Besides being expert plantsmen, they're all part of our Hort Garden Winter Seminar Series! Add in perennial favorites David Pippin and Elissa Steeves for an exceptional line-up of speakers and topics . Some require pre-registration – please check our website for times, places, details and registration forms (www.hort.vt.edu/hhg) or call 540-231-5970.



"Lightening up doesn't necessarily mean lowering your standards."
- Felder Rushing

Felder Rushing comes to Blacksburg March 1st for **Left Brain, Right Brain; Horticulture vs. Gardening (The Rules Stink - Can't We Just Have a Little Fun?)**. He's a 10th-generation Southern gardener whose "cluttered" cottage garden in Jackson, Miss., has been featured in *Garden Design*, *Southern Living*, *House and Garden*, and other publications. Understanding that many gardeners feel intimidated by a crush of how-to books and experts, Rushing delivers bottom-line points with a down-home style rife with humor, zany metaphors, and real-life anecdotes. He'll look at a variety of topics, including unkillable plants, fun and wacky container gardens, an irreverent look at pest control, and his famous Gardener's Bill of Rights.

Rushing, a contributing editor for *Horticulture Magazine*, has written and

photographed for *Garden Design*, *Fine Gardening*, and many more magazines. He hosts a live, call-in radio program on Mississippi Public Broadcasting (NPR affiliate), with co-host Dr. Dirt. He has appeared on the Discovery Channel and HGTV. His 14 gardening books include the award-winning *Passalong Plants* and *Can't Miss Container Gardening*. Reception and book signing will follow the talk.

The Southwest Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association joins with the Garden to bring you **Rick Darke** on Saturday morning, March 3rd. Based in Landenberg, Pa., Rick is a design consultant, author, photographer, and internationally-recognized authority on the use of grasses in public and private landscapes. In this talk, **Grasses for Livable Landscapes**, he'll illustrate and discuss the palette, purpose, and promise of grasses and their use in gardens and shared landscapes. Rick has authored and illustrated multiple award-

"Durably dramatic and luminously responsive, grasses are playing increasing roles in livable landscapes that blend fine garden design with conservation ethics."
- Rick Darke

winning books including *The Color Encyclopedia of Ornamental Grasses*, *The Timber Press Pocket Guide to Ornamental Grasses*, and *The American Woodland*

Garden: Capturing the Spirit of the Deciduous Forest. His latest work, *The Encyclopedia of Grasses for Livable Landscapes* (2007) includes over 1000 of his photos of grasses in diverse landscapes around the world. Formerly Curator of Plants at Longwood Gardens, Rick has traveled extensively in both hemispheres in search of

(Continued on page 2)

plants and ideas to enrich North American gardens. Note this talk will be held in the Litton-Reeves Auditorium (VT Campus). Door prizes, refreshments, and a book signing will follow. Pre-register for this talk and the Felder Rushing presentation for a special admission discount (\$30 for both).

You'll take home a gorgeous arrangement along with lots of ideas for your garden from the February 3rd 4-hour workshop **Floral Design from your Garden: Grow It, then Arrange It** by **David O. Phippen**, VT alumnus and Richmond-based horticultural educator and floral designer. First, Dr. Holly Scoggins will tag-team with David for tips for selecting and growing plants in your own garden for cut flowers and foliage. After lunch, he'll discuss the use of flowers from the florist to compliment foliage and branches from the winter garden in floral designs for the home. After a demonstration, participants will create an arrangement to take home. No floral design experience necessary! Must pre-register – limited to 30 participants.

Blacksburg's own gardening diva, **Elissa Steeves**, presents **Gardening for Old Age: Japanese Maples and Companion Plants** on February 17th. Planning ahead pays off – especially in gardening. Elissa will share both her passion for Japanese Maples (she has more than 30) and her "master plan" for making gardening easier as she gets older; by combining these lovely trees with easy-care perennials, shrubs, and groundcovers. Elissa is a certified plant nut and has one of the area's finest gardens, featured (twice!) in Southern Living magazine. She has recently retired from teaching Horticulture at Pulaski County High School – leaving her even more time to buy plants and expand her empire!

Mild-mannered but outrageously knowledgeable plantsman **Paul James** will present **Think Spring! Get Excited!** on March 17th, just about the time we're all frothing for fabulous plants. This is the season's special "Friends of the Garden" seminar – members get in free! He'll include his top picks from his 10-acre garden: a Mecca for plant enthusiasts both novice and expert. Located in the foothills of Cahas Mountain in Franklin County, Va., his garden holds a mammoth collection of conifers, azaleas and rhododendrons (6,500 species and cultivars!), Japanese Maples, magnolias and alpine plants from around the world. Want to see more? Plan on joining our late-spring "Garden Bus" tour to Paul's gorgeous garden (travel date TBD).

We'll wrap up our 2007 seminar series with **Horticulture Gone Wild: Japanese Horticultural Craftsmanship, Plantsmanship, and Nurseries** (March 24) focuses on **Dr. Todd Lasseigne's** recent finds in his travels to this plant-crazed nation. Todd notes "The high art of horticulture in Japan dates back several centuries. Most experts acknowledge that horticulture reached an apex in the 1600s during the Edo Period. From continuing breeding and selection of a seemingly unlimited set of plants to the wonderful and intricate horticultural arts practiced still today, there are vast amounts of discoveries awaiting the interests, time, and friendships of like-minded Americans." Expect more slides than time with an absolute blizzard of fabulous woody and herbaceous plants, delivered with Todd's trademark enthusiasm. He's currently the Executive Director of the Paul J. Ciener Botanical Garden in Kernersville, N.C., guiding the development and construction of this newly formed botanical garden, scheduled to open in Spring 2007.

Seen Traipsing around the U.K....

The reward for being a great gardener is...more gardens! Fifteen gardens in 13 days, to be exact.

Stephanie Huckestein, our Head Horticulturist, joined Robert McDuffie's summer tour of the Gardens of England and Wales including Sissinghurst, Bodnant, Kew, Hidcote, and the Hampton Court Flower Show. It's the least we could do to thank her for her extraordinary efforts with the recent garden expansion.



Stephanie is surrounded by a sea of lavender at Leeds (photo by Elissa Steeves).

McDuffie's next tour is a springtime adventure to the Gardens of Southern California, March 4-10. Don't miss this opportunity to see SoCal when it's green and in bloom! His classic Gardens of Italy tour is mid-summer. For more information, contact Robert at mcduff@vt.edu, go to his website at mcduff.hort.vt.edu and click on Study Abroad, or call (540) 231- 7432.

Tall Stewartia - someone you should get to know

- Dr. Alex X. Niemiera, Associate Professor, Dept. of Horticulture, and Curator of Woody Plants, Hahn Horticulture Garden

In my mind, every plant species has a persona. This persona is conferred by the visual characteristics (size, form, color, texture) and cultural aspects of a species. Taking into account these characteristics and aspects, tall stewartia (*Stewartia monadelpha*) is a demure species with grace and beauty but with less than deserved celebrity. The Hahn Horticulture Garden is most fortunate to have a tall stewartia located near the small water garden.

The most prominent feature of this species is its patchy cinnamon-brown bark which offers year-round beauty (see photo). This attraction turns the heads of casual gardeners and gives rise to bark rubbing and tree hugging by bark lovers like myself. From the look of the bark, one would assume that members of this species spent all day at the cosmetic counter at Nieman Marcus.

At maturity this petite and slow-growing tree species is about 20 feet tall in cultivation, although there are reports of 70-foot-tall specimens in the wild. This Japanese species is native to moist forests but is relatively heat tolerant and once established can tolerate occasional droughts.

It prefers light shade but can be successfully grown in full sun. In June this small tree is beautifully covered with 1.5-inch white flowers with yellow stamens. The flowers are somewhat similar to camellia; both of these are in the tea family (Theaceae). The fall foliage color ranges from a pleasant burgundy to orange.

The plant in the Hahn Horticulture Garden is at least 35 years old. It is one of the very few trees that were saved from the Horticulture Arboretum (the old Horticulture Farm on Route 460) that is now occupied by Books-A-Million and other stores. While not the oldest plant in the garden, it is certainly the most rare and highly valued occupant (not counting Holly and Stephanie).

Linnaeus named this plant, *Stewartia*, in honor of John Stuart who was a British politician in the 18th century. A transcription error led to the difference between the genus and John Stuart's name. The specific epithet, *monadelpha*, literally means "one brother" referring to fused stamens (pollen-bearing structures).

This plant is relatively rare in the gardening trade but can be found in a few mail order nurseries. As a matter of fact, I was so moved by writing this article that I just ordered a tall stewartia for my home garden. The most spectacular grouping of this species I have seen was at the Washington Park Arboretum in Seattle. By the way, if you've never been to the Washington Park Arboretum, go; it is a horticultural paradise.

I encourage you to visit our extraordinarily fine specimen of tall stewartia. You'll be pleasantly surprised to meet such a fine, understated, but first class friend. - A.X.

News flash! As of Dec. 6th, Alex and Jennifer are the proud parents of baby boy Bennett Xavier, and baby girl, Olivia Leigh, both a bit over 6 lbs each. The twins join sister Alexis, bringing the Niemiera family unit to five. Congratulations! - H.S.



Fabulous exfoliating bark of *Stewartia monadelpha* (photo A.X. Niemiera).

"From December to March, there are for many of us three gardens - the garden outdoors, the garden of pots and bowls in the house, and the garden of the mind's eye."

- Katherine S. White



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Woody Plant Curator: Dr. Alex Niemiera. If you'd rather not receive this publication, feel free to contact us by phone or email.

Notes from the Director

Hello all! After a busy but beautiful summer and fall, we've settled into life at the new Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion. Demand for the facility has been brisk for everything from receptions to workshops; safe to say it's a hit! This fall, the landscape at the Pavilion entrance has been enhanced with additional trees and shrubs. Alex's favorite *Stewartia* were planted along the front walkway to form an allée (check back in 2020 for the finished effect). Bushels of pink tulip bulbs have been planted for spring pizzazz. More expansion excitement is planned for 2007 as the grading for the Meadow Garden between the Pavilion and Duck Pond Drive will begin this winter. The meadow garden design includes a small amphitheater overlooking the meadow, a "tumble mound" for children, and a terrace with seating wall along the back of the pavilion.

And now for something totally unrelated as I exercise my editorial privileges: Though released in 2005 and now available on DVD (or heaven forbid VHS), I just have to spread the word about the garden-centric *Wallace & Gromit's Curse of the Were-rabbit*. All the action in this animated claymation epic centers around an English village obsessed with the upcoming Giant Vegetable Competition, hosted by Lady Campanula Tottingham (voiced by Helena Bonham Carter - an total hoot).

The inventive but dorky Wallace and his long-suffering dog Gromit run a humane pest control company - "Anti-Pesto" - to protect and defend the village's garden plots with ingenious inventions such as the BunVac 6000 [I would buy this if it was available]. When a monstrous creature begins ravaging the "veg", the plot thickens and prized cucurbits are in danger. Pompous, shotgun-wielding Victor Quartermain (Ralph Fiennes) vows to eliminate the beast, with deadly implications for our heroes at Anti-Pesto. Chock-full of gardening humor: gnomes galore, villagers with names like Mrs. Mulch and Miss Thripp, and watch for the "Pansy Spray". Suitable for absolutely everyone, this film delivers lots of laughs along with carrot-biting drama.

More randomness: my alma mater for two Horticulture degrees, The University of Georgia (go dawgs!), plays Virginia Tech in the Chick-fil-a Bowl (née Peach Bowl). I am ALSO a big fan and supporter of the Hokies. No question, I must attend this bowl game. But then the moral dilemma sets in...what do I do? Sew two shirts together? Cheer for every single play? One of my teams is sure to lose, but one shall also emerge victorious. This begs the existential question: "is my cup half empty or half full?" Aargh! Oh, wait... it's just football.

Finally, my apologies...you may have noticed the delay in getting this latest newsletter out. Unfortunately, 'tis also the season for grant proposals, progress reports, and all other manner of academic-type output. This late date does give the opportunity for season's greetings, so have a delightful holiday season. From all of us at the garden, our best wishes to you and yours for a healthy, prosperous, and plant-filled 2007!

- Holly Scoggins