

# Gardening on the Shore

Winter, 2021

## Message from the President

Ah, yes. The seed catalogs are filling our mailboxes and the daffodils are pushing through the soil - a sure sign that Spring is just around the corner! Time to return to our passion - gardening!

I am excited about what the future holds for our wonderful organization! Although COVID has slowed us down for the last year, I believe that 2021 is going to be a fantastic year for all of us. This unusual situation encourages us to think outside the box. Challenge yourself to do something different this year and share your success stories with us. Maybe you always wanted to try planting potatoes but don't want to dig up a large garden. Try planting them in a grow bag on your porch. Add herb plants to your flower garden. Many herb plants produce beautiful flowers as well as delightfully scented foliage.

Many of you have had the pleasure of working with Rita Hilton or have been given seedlings or divisions of her plants. At her request, she has been given Master Gardener Emeritus status. She certainly has earned this status based on her seventeen years of service to this organization. Rita promises we will still see her around!

Also, a new training class started on October with nine future Master Gardeners currently enrolled. The Education Committee has gone above and beyond the call of duty to make this class happen under extremely adverse conditions.

Please try to stay involved in our many Master Gardener activities during these difficult times following Virginia COVID-19 Guidelines. The health benefits for each of us are numerous!

Stay safe and hope to see you all in the near future.

Joyce Falkinburg

## IN THIS ISSUE

### Feature Article

- Learn About Vegetable Gardening & Composting

### Articles of Interest

- Welcome New ESVMG Officers
- Gardening for Nature

### Gardener Tips

- Landscaping for Less in the Landfill
- Winter 'TO DO' List
- Know your Natives

### ESVMG Highlights

---

## Feature Article

### EMG Trainees Learn about Vegetable Gardening and Composting

*Perhaps you have always wanted to learn more about gardening. Maybe you grew up experiencing the thrill of a garden and wanted to take the next step. You may have a passion for teaching and would like the opportunity to help others improve the community through sound horticultural practices. Or maybe you are just curious and want to meet a bunch of friendly folks. Whatever the reason, many people across the state enroll in the annual Master Gardener training program which sets them on the road to earning the credentials of an Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteer.*

*This year, although challenging with the threat of COVID 19 upon us, nine brave souls made the commitment to enroll in the EMG program. Trained under the auspices of the Virginia Cooperative Extension, these volunteers gain organizational and horticultural knowledge “to launch community horticulture education programs to benefit [their] locality ... and contribute to the improvement of horticultural practices in [their] community.”*

*The ESVMG program offers 25 sessions on such topics as Water Quality, Pesticide Use, Fruits in the Garden, Native Plants and Invasives, Plant Propagation, Woody Landscape Plants, and Landscape Design. These sessions and more are designed to provide additional insight into the topics included in The Virginia Master Gardener Handbook and are taught by industry professionals, local experts, and our own Master Gardeners.*

*This article covers information taught in the January 27 presentation on “Vegetable Gardening and Composting” by Janet Rochester, ESVMG EMG.*

In her recent presentation to ESVMG trainees, Janet Rochester provided lots of good information on vegetable gardening and composting. For starters, she reviewed the advantages of growing one’s own food. Growing your own vegetables allows us to grow organically, controlling the amount and types of pest controls used, allows us to experience the

true fresh taste versus a product that has been engineered to maintain a long shelf life and resist pesticides, and saves energy and the environment by reducing carbon intensive transportation costs. And, then, there is always the perennial benefit of getting outside with your “hands in the soil.”

There are many vegetables that grow well on the Eastern Shore, and Janet advises to stick with the tried-and-true ones to increase the chances of success. Of course, we all know

#### SOME EASY VEGGIES TO START WITH

- Tomatoes— need 4’ stake or cage
- Lettuce —Black Seeded Simpson, Red Sails— pick leaves
- Swiss chard— soak seeds, cut outer leaves
- Pole beans— like it hot, bush beans— cooler—pick every 2– 3 days
- Cukes — wait until after 4/21— heavy feeders— need support
- Radishes— fall safe
- Peppers— need water
- Squashes, zucchini, melons
- Potatoes— kids
- Companion plants— herbs, flowers



that tomatoes and potatoes are a stale crop here, but she also recommended, among others, lettuces, beans and radishes as good choices for our soil and climate.

There are a number of guidelines to follow to produce a healthy garden. Sunlight, soil, and water are important success factors. First, the garden must receive at least six hours of sunlight per day between the hours of 10:00 am and 6:00 pm.

For the soil, the amount of critical minerals is important information to know. Nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium

(K) along with the level of pH and micronutrients are important components to a healthy soil. Nitrogen promotes green growth (think leafy vegetables) and is used by plants quickly. Phosphorus is good for root and fruit development. And potassium is good for plant growth and disease resistance. A pH reading of 6.5 will support most vegetables.

The type of soil is also important to know. Soil can be primarily clay, loam or sand. The best soil type is sandy loam which is not hard to find on the Eastern Shore. Janet pointed out that there are spots, however, where the soil is mostly clay. If the soil is too sandy, she advises to add organic matter in the form of compost.

When deciding where to locate the garden, consider a site close to the house to make it easier to keep an eye on. Frequent inspections enable the gardener to identify

Referring to her rain gauge, Janet recorded 54" of rainfall last year, a significant increase over the 45" annual average. "But the rain fell mostly in the spring and fall, still requiring extra water in the middle of summer."

and ward off problems early before they get out of hand. Also consider the garden's proximity to a water source – the closer to a faucet the better to cut down on the time-consuming task of lugging a water hose to a remote spot. Janet advised that "for a small plot, a good watering source can be a rain barrel and watering can!" It is best to water early in the morning and to avoid getting the leaves wet. On average, plants require

1" of water per week.

Janet advised the new gardener to start small so as not to become overwhelming the first year. Also, be

aware of how much space a plant requires, noting that plants such as tomatoes and squash require a lot of space to spread out. And for vining plants, a vertical support can be used to keep them growing upward instead of outward. The new gardener should also avoid the temptation of purchasing more tools than needed, focusing, instead, on building an inventory of essential tools such as a spade, garden fork, shovel, rake, and trowel. A wheelbarrow is also a useful item. And a rain gauge provides good information to help the gardener know when to water. There are advantages to creating raised beds or planting in containers vs. planting directly in the ground. The gardener has better control over the quality of soil. Weeds are not as rampant in a raised bed

*Continued on page 10*

---

## Articles of Interest

### Welcome New ESVMG Officers

*In 2021 we extend a welcome to our new Board members and committee chairpersons and a thank you to those who served last year and will continue into this year. This article introduces our new recruits. Please be sure to give them a personal welcome and word of appreciation when you next see them.*

#### Joyce Falkinburg, President



Joyce retired from the University of Maryland where she worked as their Construction Procurement Director. She and her husband bought their house in Atlantic, VA in 2002 in anticipation of retirement and moved there permanently several years later. Her first garden memory was her Dad taking her and her sisters to Longwood Gardens where they could frolic through the rose gardens. Through the years, she dabbled with gardening with limited success. Joyce is “grateful for the MG program because it taught me how much I didn’t know!” In addition to her love for gardening, Joyce enjoys traveling, reading, and college “hoops” and football. Joyce became an Extension Master Gardener in August, 2016.

#### Robin Swert, Member at Large (Accomack)



Robin moved to the Shore five years ago with her daughter and family after her daughter took a position at Eastern Shore Rural Health. They decided about 15 years ago to combine households and “haven’t looked back since!” Robin retired from the US Postal Service after a career of 35 years, much of it in her home state of Ohio. Robin’s grandparents on both sides had farms, and they were active gardeners and in 4-H. She graduated with a B.S. Psychology in 2012 from George Mason and worked for a year with Therapeutic Interventions as a Qualified Mental Health Professional for Children. She finished her Master Gardener internship in 2020 and is currently the leader for the CSB garden in Parksley which marries her love of gardening with mental health. “I look forward to 2021 with the hope of more time in the dirt and the sun.”

### **Jennifer Alley, Member at Large (Northampton)**



Jen Alley and her husband, Shelton, moved to Belle Haven from Reston in 2002. That was followed by a move to their current home in the Capeville area in 2010. In addition to raising two daughters, Jen worked for the National Wildlife Federation as art editor in their book program, for the State of Washington on archaeology projects, and the Fairfax County school system as a Special Ed classroom aide. Jen became an Extension Master Gardener in 2015.

Besides gardening, Jen volunteers at the ES SPCA, and, prior to COVID-19, helped process book donations at Nassawdox Free Library. Jen loves gardening and has practiced it all her life, starting in her youth when her mom PAID HER TO WEED, a penny per dandelion! You can find her at

Kiptopeke Native Plant Garden, on Thursdays from 9-11. "All are welcome, we have a lot of fun and get lots done!"

### **Cindy Ray, Treasurer**

After spending 35 years as a class A contractor, both residential and commercial, in Virginia Beach, Cindy retired. She and her husband bought their home in Franktown, on the Nassawadox Creek, three years ago "in search of a more peaceful life." She signed up for the Master Gardener class and became an ESVMG EMG in 2018. Last March, just before COVID shutdown, Cindy became the lead for the Pollinator Garden at the Northampton Library. Like most of the gardens, "we did very little, but did manage to keep it alive." We are looking forward to getting back in the garden and back to meeting in person. "I look forward to serving as the Treasurer for this organization, learning more about gardening and getting to meet more of the master gardeners."

### **Julie Callahan, Publicity Chair**



Julie and her husband moved to the Virginia Eastern Shore in the fall of 2016 from the "Philly burbs." Julie is a retired opera singer who always wanted to live by the water. Her late husband was an astronomer, so the dark skies here were perfect. Before experiencing limitations due to arthritis, Julie had a huge vegetable and flower garden. Right now, she enjoys quilting, embroidery, the Woman's Club, and Franktown Church. Julie became an EMG in 2019.



### **Brenda Fitzsimmons, Membership Chair**



Brenda moved to the Virginia Eastern Shore from Pennsylvania almost 5 years ago. She is proud to claim one of her biggest accomplishments is visiting all 50 states. Brenda became an ESVMG EMG in 2019.

### **Julie Cardinale, Hospitality Chair**



Having moved to the Eastern Shore from Winchester, VA, Julie has lived in a lot of places. She planted her first organic garden in 1972 and never stopped. When she retired “becoming a Master Gardener seemed the next logical step.” Julie became an ESVMG EMG in 2016.



## **Gardening for Nature**

By Jane McKinley, ESVMG EMG

When we garden with nature, we surround ourselves with our own version of natural beauty. Our home landscape becomes beautiful to the eye, meaningful to the heart and supportive of the natural world around us.

As a starting point, think back to a lasting memory you had in nature. Think about the elements that made up this natural landscape – it could include pretty stones, lighting and shadows, flowing water, wildflower meadows or a peaceful woodland. And think about how nature put together color, form, materials, and plants to create this experience. Finally, think about the wildlife that resides there and how it interacts with its surroundings. These are all important inputs for planning your own garden for nature, otherwise referred to as a habitat garden.



On a recent walk along the sandy pine-populated path at Savage Neck Wildlife Preserve, this edging of native moss dotted with red fallen berries caught my eye. And the random sprinkling of pine needles gives it even more of a natural feel. Think about how this could be emulated in your own garden.

## Create a Healthy Plant Community

A garden that supports nature is composed of a diverse, healthy plant community that provides multiple ecological services. Plant communities intercept rainfall to replenish the groundwater and reduce flooding and erosion. They cycle nutrients, exchange oxygen, and sequester carbon. Perhaps one of the most crucial functions of a plant community is the life-sustaining support it provides to its wildlife species. The plant community provides organic matter for a variety of organisms, such as bacteria and fungi, and provide food and cover for wildlife, including birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Biologically diverse communities of plants and animals, when combined with surrounding elements of soil, water, and sunlight, form a continuous energy exchange called an ecosystem. Forests, wetlands, and prairies are examples of ecosystems. And the home gardener can create a mini ecosystem through thoughtful planning and nature's inspiration.

If we want to restore and sustain biodiversity in the home landscape, we simply need to "put back" many of the plant species and other elements that would naturally have occurred there and arrange them in such a way to support wildlife. Here we can take lessons from nature. Look at the natural layers in a forest. On the ground plane of an eastern deciduous forest, the first component is the mulch layer, which maintains soil temperature and can protect the ground from erosion. This layer is critical for the decomposition process and supports many insects such as beetles and millipedes which, in turn,

One of the first steps in establishing a nature-inspired garden is to retain the leaf litter in the landscape.

become food for other carnivorous creatures such as centipedes. They also feed other wildlife such as salamanders and toads, small mammals, and birds. The leaf litter and woody debris are broken down through the insects' chewing and shredding along with the natural process of decay, releasing nutrients back into the soil where plants can take them up again. This continuous recycling of organic matter and replenishment of soil is a most valuable aspect of the mulch layer.

Therefore, one of the first steps in establishing a habitat garden is to retain the leaf litter in the landscape. On top of the mulch, the next in the forest example is a layer of herbaceous groundcover which provides a protective covering for the soil below. Foam flower, wild ginger, woodland phlox, and columbine are some of the plants in this layer which may also contain a variety of ferns and vines. This layer is composed of a diverse collection of plants of varying heights versus a carpet of a single height, such as a mowed lawn. Standing above the herbaceous layer is the shrub layer composed of flowering shrubs that grow in a wide range of sizes. This layer can contain a low bush blueberry at 2' high mixed with a 10' high viburnum mixed with a 20' high witch hazel or rhododendron.

Overhead is found the tallest plants, the tree layer. This layer is composed of understory trees such as the redbud and flowering dogwood. And, above it all

stands the overhead canopy provided by the tallest trees such as oaks, pines, and birches.

*Continued on page 12*

---

## Gardeners' Tips

### Landscaping for Less in the Landfill

Excerpt from VCE Publication 426-716

*In the article "Gardening for Nature" the value of mulch to the decomposition process and to support wildlife is discussed. The following excerpt provides some ideas of how to use naturally occurring "yard waste" to create valuable mulch and to enhance yards, gardens, and soil vs. dumping it in the landfill.*

#### Move Materials for Best Landscape Use

- Pine needles make an attractive, exceptionally long-lasting mulch. Many organic mulches, including pine needles and leaves, are especially useful around acid loving plants because they may help maintain soil acidity as they decompose.
- Brush piles can be located to provide habitat for wildlife. Camouflage piles by planting attractive vines, such as autumn clematis, to grow over them.
- Grass clippings that are too thick to be left on the lawn can be collected and used as mulch (1- to 2-inch layer) on vegetable and fruit plants; however, don't use clippings from grass that has been treated with an herbicide.
- Rake leaves and use as mulch (up to 6 inches thick before compaction) to prevent weeds in the garden. Spread leaves around tree trunks to reduce damage from lawn mowers.
- Fill bags with leaves and use as insulation in a cold frame.
- Till leaves directly into your vegetable garden or annual flower beds to break down by spring. Because leaf decomposition uses nitrogen from your soil, you may want to till in manure along with the leaves or add a small amount of nitrogen fertilizer to enhance the process.
- Use leaves as mulch on bare ground to prevent erosion.
- Cover paths between raised beds with leaves in the fall to keep down spring weeds.



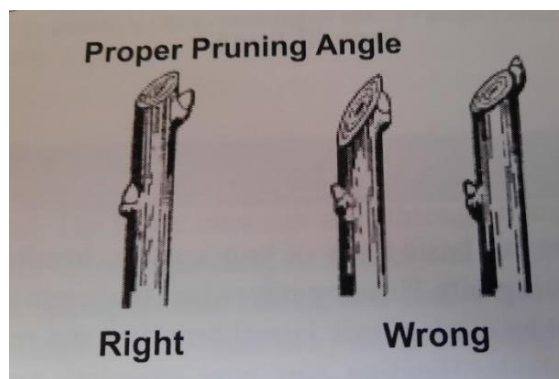
## ESVMG HIGHLIGHTS

- The 20-hour service requirement for all members will be reinstated as of April 20, 2021. 2020 Interns will have an extended period for them to complete their 50-hour service requirement.
- Both the 2021 International Master Gardening Conference and Master Gardener College will be virtual events.
- Next General Membership Meeting: April 6

### Winter 'TO DO' List

*With the chill of winter upon us, it may appear that there's not much for a gardener to do. But there are plenty of activities that can – and should! - be done during these months. Of course, planning for the upcoming growing season is the most fun as we leisurely browse through the plethora of seed and plant catalogs. But don't forget the following cold weather tasks that help to insure a happy spring garden.*

- Prune, plant and transplant trees and shrubs while dormant so they can get a good head start on root growth.
- Remove tree limbs broken from snow or ice as soon as possible. Clean edges promote better healing in the spring.
- Cut back dead stems and leaves of perennials and grasses before they begin to produce new growth in the spring.
- In mid-February, sow seeds of cool season vegetables such as carrots, snow peas, spinach, radish, and turnips directly in the garden.
- Move holiday plants to a cool, bright room which is free from drafts.
- Place seed catalog orders early to ensure that you get what you want and in time to start them indoors if this is your plan.
- Clean and sharpen your garden tools and oil all moving parts. Store them indoors to avoid rust.
- Plan your vegetable garden for the coming year, keeping in mind the need to rotate crops.
- Water as needed if month is dry.



“When cutting back to a side (lateral) branch, choose a branch that forms an angle of no more than 45 degrees with the branch to be removed. Also, the branch that you cut back to should have a diameter at least half that of the branch to be removed.”

Master Gardener Handbook, Chapter 11

## Know Your Natives

*As interest in native plants and how to incorporate them into one's landscape grows, with each issue, this new series will introduce the reader to a select variety of native plant. The plant featured will be at its most attractive during the current season. For the winter, the Yaupon deserves recognition with its showy red berries that persist during our coldest months.*

### **Yaupon, *Ilex vomitoria***

This native holly is a broadleaf evergreen shrub or small tree indigenous to the coastal plains and maritime forests from Virginia to Florida. It can reach up to 20' tall and 12' wide.



Fragrant inconspicuous flowers appear in the spring on separate male and female plants with the females producing red berries that last through the winter.

Plant Yaupon in average, well-drained soil in sun to partial shade. This native plant can withstand both drought and occasional flooding and is resistant to deer, salt, and wind. It supports native wildlife including butterflies, pollinators, small animals, songbirds, and bees. Growing rapidly, it makes a good privacy screen, hedge, or windbreak. It has no insect or disease problems.

The leaves and stems can be dried and brewed to make a caffeinated tea and was used by native American Indians in a cleansing ceremony. They would drink it in such large quantities that it would make them vomit, cleaning out their systems. Thus, the botanical name "*vomitoria*."

This is a common plant in the nursery industry and is, therefore, readily available at the garden center. It has a tendency to form thickets, so suckers should be removed to maintain a desirable growth habit and, if desired, it will also take heavy pruning.

---

## EMG Trainees Learn about Vegetable Gardening and Composting

*Continued from page 3*

or container. And, if portable, the planter can be moved around to take advantage of the sun during changing times of day or seasons. One must be aware, however, that the soil dries out faster.

In Virginia, there are three growing seasons: spring, summer, and fall/winter. For a spring garden, plan to get your plants in the ground after the last killing frost which, according to the

VA Extension Service, can be as early as April 10. If a frost is predicted after your plants are in the ground, they can be protected by covering with a sheet or blanket at night. Floating row covers or cold frames enable the gardener to start plants earlier in the season. The first frost in the fall is usually around mid-November. There are approximately 230 frost-free days in our region.

The gardener has a choice of starting plants from seed or purchasing them as young plants. In the writer's opinion, although it may save some money in the long run, starting plants from seed requires a lot of dedication. To start seeds indoors, one must provide adequate light which can be hard to provide in an indoor environment.

It is recommended that light from a window be supplemented by an artificial source. Use a timer to ensure that a sufficient amount of light is available to the seedlings. If in a cool location, consider using a warming device to encourage germination and ensure healthy growth. Keep the seedlings well-watered. Once the plants are installed in the garden, maintenance begin. In addition to the

#### PEST PREVENTION

Fertilize, pH, mulch

Companion planting

- Onions
- Garlic
- Celery

Flowers/herbs

- Thyme and sage repel cabbage moth
- Rue and white-flowered geraniums offensive to Japanese beetles
- Basil – tomato hornworms
- French marigolds

Rotate crops

Plant disease resistant crops

continuing need for adequate water, weed and pest controls and feeding the soil are

#### SEEDS OR PLANTS?

- Obvious statement #1 – seeds take longer to produce
- Obvious statement #2 – plants are more expensive than seeds
- Seeds come with instructions
- Save your own seed

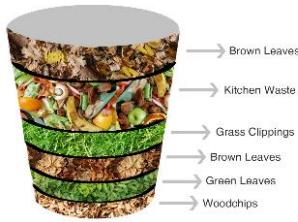
important. A vigilant routine of pulling weeds as soon as they appear works to keep them under control (marking the rows where seeds were planted helps to distinguish between weeds and vegetable seedlings).

The first step in treating for a pest is to identify what it is. It could be an animal, insect, or something else like caterpillars or spider mites. Each type requires a different treatment. Fencing and netting can be effective in controlling animal pests, although, a tried-and-true method of controlling deer has yet to be discovered (Janet says: Good luck!). If using insecticides, do so sparingly and only as directed, even when using a natural product such as insecticidal soap and neem oil. Use the least toxic product possible.

A good defense strategy against harmful insects is to encourage natural predators such as birds, toads, bats and other insects. Ladybugs and praying mantis are effective insect predators. Insects can also be removed by a strong water spray (most effective when done in combination with

other methods). Companion planting has proven to be an effective insect deterrent. Planting strong-scented plants such as onions, garlic, marigolds, thyme and basil will ward off many types of problem insects.

### WHAT TO COMPOST



Other mechanical remedies include manually picking off insects or using traps, barriers and

cages to combat a variety of pests.

To encourage plants to be their healthiest, nutrients in the soil must be maintained. After getting the plants started right by providing the correct amount of NPK and pH plants appreciate being fed during the growing season. This can be done by applying natural fertilizers such as bone and blood meal, animal manures, fish emulsion and seaweed. Compost makes an ideal supplement.

Compost can easily be made by the home gardener. It returns nutrients to the soil, uses plant waste by keeping these materials

out of the landfill, and is inexpensive. The compost can be an elaborate system or merely a pile located in an out-of-the way spot. Materials to compost include a combination of browns (carbon) and greens (nitrogen). Brown ingredients include straw and dead leaves and weeds. Greens come from grass clippings, vegetable scraps and weeds which are pulled out of the garden. Weeds should be seed free. Non-plant matter such as egg shells and manure from herbivores can also be used.

Avoid adding animal products to the compost such as meat, fish, cheese and bones. Also, avoid oily materials such as eggs and butter. These products can become putrid, attract unwanted predators, and don't break down into healthy compost.

The compost pile can be turned to expedite the decomposition process or left unturned where the bottom layer will naturally decompose. Systems can be purchased that allow access to the bottom of the pile where the usable material has "cooked." Look for a consistency similar to dark bread crumbs which indicates that it's ready to apply.



## Gardening for Nature

*Continued from page 8*

### Contributing Elements

A diverse plant community is the key to a successful habitat garden. But they are not the only elements that contribute to the health and beauty of your landscape.

Consider adding a brush pile behind an out-building and incorporating a cluster of stones to provide places for wildlife to seek shelter. The “nooks and crannies” afford cool dark areas to rest and provide valuable hiding spots from predators. Although brush piles are best suited to fairly large size lots, stones can be placed wherever they will blend naturally with the surrounding landscape. They create a good foundation, relieving the repetitious green colors, fine textures, and regular shapes of plants. Arrange the rocks unevenly, with spaces in between and, like in nature, establish groundcover around the edges or a vine that will grow over them. A nice companion planting around and throughout a sunny rock pile would be a mixture of ‘Silver Mound’ artemisia and gaillardia.

Water is an essential element in a habitat garden and can be provided in many ways. On the Eastern Shore, many of us have the advantage of a water view. And those of us who don’t, can easily create a habitat that incorporates water into the design. A small backyard pond surrounded by natural stones, shells, and water-loving plants will give a calm and restful feel. A



bird bath, placed close to a shrub or tree for quick access to cover, is an easy water feature. Create a small mud puddle where butterflies can go to obtain minerals. You may have observed this “puddling” behavior along the muddy edges of roads after a rainstorm. Divert a shallow depression where rainwater naturally collects into a mini-wetland planted with bog-loving plants such as irises and cardinal flower and edged with elderberry for the shrub layer.

Color and the presence of light are two other critical elements in the natural landscape. To introduce color into the garden, be aware of the balance of weight and intensity in the color palette that you choose. Purple is the darkest and most intense of colors. Conversely, yellow is the lightest. When creating a balance of color, nature can teach a lesson. Think about a woodland path alongside of a creek. The shade on the path, dark foliage of the groundcover and tree trunks, and the dark water are all heavy and dominant colors. Nature, then, adds a bit of contrast with light colored rocks, variegated leaves on some woodland plants, and seasonal blooms of bright white, yellows, and reds on groundcovers and vines. When designing for color in your own garden, use this lesson to identify the predominance of one intensity and, then, minimally add a contrasting color to give it balance and interest.

It’s also good to consider the glow of white and light yellow in the fading dusk of sunset. Place these colors close to where you will be spending time in the evening where their brilliance will be enhanced in the evening light. Dark colors draw attention to a landscape feature. Use them to encircle a birdbath or to draw one down a pathway.



## Ideas for Natural Landscaping

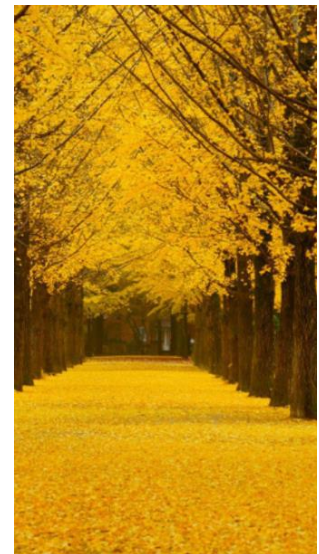


What inspiration can you get when looking at this stark tree profile against the blue sky seen here along the shoreline?

To create your habitat garden, take inspiration from nature. You may have been inspired by a wildflower meadow at the foot of a soaring mountain range. Although we don't have the high elevations or wildflowers native to a mountainous region, we do have just as much natural beauty that will do a great job of populating that inspirational scene. Instead of mountains, we have shorelines, inlets and maritime forests. Instead of bluebonnets and "Aspen" daisies we have many native perennials such as black-eyed Susans, purple coneflowers, and liatris that will do a fine job of creating a palette of seasonal color. And our native grasses, sedges, and shrubs such as high-tide bush and spicebush would provide year-round interest along the meadow's edge.

Most of our built landscapes are typically missing one or more vegetative layer, and here is an opportunity! When choosing the most appropriate plants to enhance or create the garden scene, strive to include multiple vertical layers of vegetation, filling in existing voids with native plants that complete the plant community. Use this as the starting point while also considering the site conditions such as terrain, wind, sun exposure and micro-climates.

Reimagine an expanse of flat, uniform lawn by emulating a meadow habitat made up of sun-loving native grasses and flowers. Shrub beds can also be situated in the middle of a lawn to create a habitat island. Rather than installing a single row of plants, arrange them in random groupings to appear more natural and add visual interest. Where the yard has some tree cover but little else, introduce a shrub border and groundcovers along an edge where the grouping will be adjacent to taller trees. If a lawn grows right up to the edge of a body of water, as in nature, create a buffer of plants to filter runoff, shade the water, and prevent the soil from eroding the banks. This buffer will also discourage Canada geese from taking up residence since they approach from the water and need open access to come onto land. And, instead of continuing the futile attempt to grow grass under trees, look to nature to see what grows naturally on the forest floor. Herbaceous perennials such as false Solomon seal and wild ginger, ephemerals such as Virginia bluebells and mayapples, mosses, and ferns are good choices for the home "forest."



Nothing is prettier than a path of fallen ginkgo leaves.

Create the feel of a walk in the woods by replicating woodland features. This includes a shady path lined with layers of groundcovers and eye-catching perennials. Create an adventure by winding the path around a corner or splitting the path to offer several directions in which to walk. Resist the temptation to edge the entire path with a



single plant, instead choosing those of varied heights and forms. Line the path with natural materials that are found locally such as shells, pine needles, fallen leaves or flower petals.



Not only is a layering of heights desirable, but combining different leaf shapes, colors and textures is another lesson we can learn from nature. If one looks closely, a walk in the wild offers much diversity of leaf types. Mix the feathery foliage of ferns with broad, upright leaves of perennials such as money plant and hostas. Combine native oxalis and dutchman's breeches to create a groundcover that contrasts a soft rounded leaf with weeping, fine-leaved foliage. Or, as shown in the picture, in a sunny spot combine the upright bronzy leaves of a native grass with the dark green rounded leaves of pittosporum.

And don't forget the value of a winter landscape which offers experiences not available in the lush months. One feature that can take the winter center stage is interesting tree bark and form. To be enjoyed from an inside view, consider planting a stand of white birches surrounded by berry-laden shrubbery that will attract birds. This combination is sure to delight as one is peering through the window and warmed by the fireside.

### **2020 ESVMG BOARD MEMBERS**

President – Joyce Falkinburg  
Past President – Phil Goetkin  
Vice-President – Jocelyn Grover  
Secretary – Marianne Francavilla  
Treasurer – Cindy Ray  
Member at Large (Accomack) – Robin Swert  
Member at Large (Northampton) – Jennifer Alley

### **COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS**

Membership Committee Chair – Brenda Fitzsimmons  
Education Committee Chair – Christine Williams  
Publicity Committee Chair – Julie Callahan  
Hospitality Committee Chair – Julie Cardinale

[VISIT ESVMG FACEBOOK PAGE](#)

[VISIT ESVMG WEBSITE](#)



## Eastern Shore of Virginia Master Gardeners

Newsletter Editor: Jane McKinley

23303 Front St., PO Box 60, Accomack, VA 23301.

Phone: 757-787-1361/Hotline: 757-678-7946. E-mail [esmgv@gmail.com](mailto:esmgv@gmail.com).

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Jill Wright at [757-385-4769](tel:757-385-4769) during the business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event. TDD number [\(800\) 828-1120](tel:800-828-1120).

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; M. Ray McKinnie, Interim Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg.

