



Fluvanna

REVIEW

Grow Into Fall

*Fluvanna Master Gardeners
help prepare your yard for
the changing season*

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A CENTURY OF SERVICE
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by people enslaved at Bremo
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POWER PLANT SCRUTINY
Tenaska pressed on on cooling,
noise, and transmission
PAGE 8

Tailgate Savings!



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DEADLINE Advertising due by Wednesday at 5 p.m. for the issue released eight days later. Submissions, letters and calendar items due by Friday at 9 a.m. for the subsequent paper.
DISPLAY AND WEB ADS For information including rates and deadlines, email Heather Michon at sales@fluvannareview.com

On the cover: Congratulations to Aiden Mehalic, the winner of the Fluvanna Review's Summer in Fluvanna Photo Contest! Aiden's winning photo, "Secret Gardens in My Mind," was taken at Pleasant Grove's Butterfly Garden. Cover design by Amelia McConnell.

GENERAL

The *Fluvanna Review* is published weekly by Rivanna Publishing LLC. and covers Fluvanna exclusively. It is printed on Tuesday mornings. One copy is free. Additional copies are \$1 each, payable in advance to the publisher.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Copies will be mailed for the subscription price of \$180.00 annually or \$90.00 for 6 months. Mail your check to: *Fluvanna Review*, Subscriptions Dept. P.O. Box 93, Palmyra, VA 22963. For more information email sales@fluvannareview.com.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor should be a maximum of 350 words and include the name, phone number, and address of the author. The phone number and street address are for the paper's records only. We reserve the right to edit letters to the editor. Submit to editor@fluvannareview.com

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NEWS HOTLINE

If you see news happening, call 434-591-1000.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Community calendar items must be about community events, under 50 words, and will run only once a month.



BEAUTIFUL GATE CHURCH

YARD SALE

4 CENTRE COURT
OCT. 2nd: 9am-5pm
OCT. 3rd: 7am-Noon

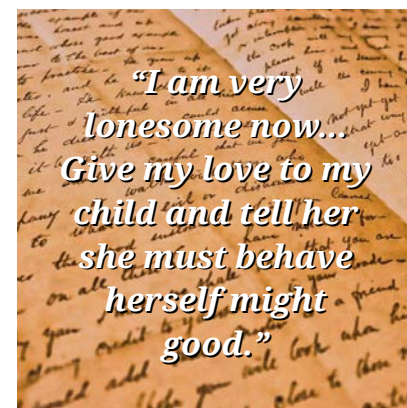
WWW.BEAUTIFULGATECHURCH.ORG

FILM SCREENING
The Words They Left Behind:
Letters of the Enslaved

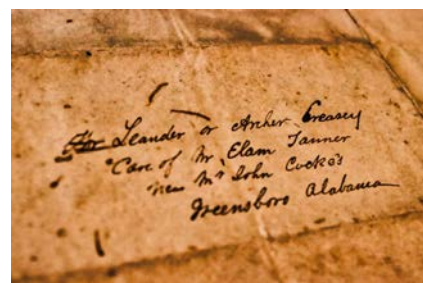
a documentary film by Horace Scruggs III

Sunday
September 27
3pm
at Palmyra Methodist Church
Sanctuary

OLD STONE JAIL TOURS | 2-3 AND 4-5PM
RECEPTION WITH REFRESHMENTS FROM 4-5PM



Letter from Kesiah Moss to her enslaver expressing her feelings on being parted from her family after their forced migration.



Letter by enslaved worker Jack Greasy to his brothers held in the Fluvanna Historical Society Archives

View the documentary and join in a discussion about "The Words They Left Behind: Letters of the Enslaved," which chronicles the creation of the Fluvanna Historical Society's museum exhibition featuring letters written by enslaved people at Bremon Plantation. Through these remarkable documents and conversations with descendants and historians, the film explores the enduring impacts of forced migration, family separation, and the preservation of enslaved voices. Take a tour of the Old Stone Jail Exhibit before or after the film screening. Light refreshments will be served at the Fellowship Hall following the screening.

Thanks to funding from:
The Commonwealth History Fund
BAMA Works
& Private Donors

FLUVANNA
Historical Society

For all events, visit
fluvannahistory.org/events

Fluvanna field hockey falls 3-2 in overtime

BY DUNCAN NIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

On Sept. 15, the Fluvanna girls field hockey team hosted the Hilltoppers from E.C. Glass High in Lynchburg.

Field hockey is usually a low-scoring sport. It is tough and sometimes dangerous, as sticks and a hard ball are always in play. The ball is normally hit along the ground, but it can come up and hit a player hard. The game is played in fifteen-minute quarters.

In the first quarter, the Flucos controlled the ball extensively. With 7:25 left in the quarter, junior Claire Petrylak scored for the Flucos from close range after a scramble in front of the Hilltoppers' goalie. The Flucos subsequently had two strong runs down the field, one by Petrylak and another by senior Caroline Thomas. However, they were not able to up the score and the quarter ended with the Flucos leading 1-0.

Late in the second quarter, the Hilltoppers evened the score.

They also scored off a scramble in front of the goal. The goal came immediately after the Hilltoppers were awarded a corner as the result of a penalty on the Flucos.

A corner in field hockey is very different from a corner kick in soccer. A player on the attacking team places the ball on the end line beside the goal. The attacking team lines up players in front of the goal, and the defending team stations two defenders on the end line between the goal posts on either side of the goalie. The ball is hit out in front of the goal so one attacker has a clear shot and can try to shoot between the defenders and into the goal. The result is often a scramble in front of the goal with sticks swinging vigorously.

The Fluco goalie made an initial stop, but an E.C. Glass attacker was able to push the ball into the goal. As the half was ending, Fluco goalie Farah Evans made an excellent save, keeping the score even.

The third quarter was scoreless. E.C. Glass earned another penalty corner, but the Flucos defended it successfully.

With 7:18 remaining in the fourth quarter, senior Mallory Esch, one of the Flucos' captains, scored a go-ahead goal off an impressive downfield run. Unfortunately for the Flucos, the Hilltoppers responded quickly, scoring again off a penalty corner, with just under five minutes remaining.

At the end of regulation, the score was 2-2, and a sudden-death overtime period followed. The Flucos again stopped a penalty corner three minutes into the overtime. But E.C. Glass was able to score the winning goal on a close-in shot

after five minutes of play.

After the game, Head Coach Jennifer Payne lauded the steady play of Caroline Dahl and Petrylak. She also noted that Evans recorded an impressive 10 saves on the night, bringing the season total to 59 saves.

The team continues a busy stretch. The Flucos traveled to Louisa County on Sept. 17 and hosted Northumberland two days later. They played at Orange County on Sept. 22 and will host Monticello High on Sept. 24 and Albemarle High on Sept. 29.

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SEP 24 – 30, 2026 | FLUVANNA REVIEW | 3



LAKE VIEWS

NEWS FROM YOUR LAKE MONTICELLO NEIGHBORS

SO MUCH FUN THIS FALL, YOU'LL WANT TO DO IT ALL!

From food and drinks to events, activities, entertainment and more, there's always something to enjoy around the Lake. And don't forget, our golf course and eateries are open to the public!

Special Events

- **Every Sunday through October 25:** Fluvanna Farmer's Market, 11 AM – 2 PM, in Crofton Plaza.
- **September 26:** Fluvanna County & Lake Monticello Fire Departments "Fire Prevention Day", 9 AM – 3 PM, Pleasant Grove. Meet your local firefighters, watch live demonstrations, learn fire safety tips, and more! Plus giveaways for the kids.

Fun at the Bunker Bistro

Located at 51 Bunker Blvd.

- **Brunch every Sunday**, 10 AM – 2 PM.
- **Tuesday Kids eat FREE:** 11 AM – 8 PM. Kids eat free ALL DAY with purchase of an adult meal.
- **Thirsty Thursdays:** 4-8 PM. Half-price bottles of house wine every Thursday.
- **September 25:** Chicken Head Blues Band, 6-8:30 PM. It's 9-2-5, so wear your BEST Dolly Parton attire!
- **October 1:** French Wine Tasting, 5 PM.
- **October 2:** The Bard of the Blueridge is back! Matthew O'Donnell, 6 PM. Enjoy Irish music, beer, and food specials!

Lakeside Restaurant

Located at 41 Ashlawn Blvd.

- **Sundays – Wednesdays:** All-You-Can-Eat Buffet! Chicken Sundays; Italian Mondays; International Tuesdays; and Seafood & Fish Fry Wednesdays. Sides and salad bar available each night.
- **October 10:** The Big Band, Sentimental Journey, 6 PM. Buffet dinner will be available, but is optional. *Note: The Bunker Bistro will close at 4 PM to prepare for this event.*

LMOA Fall Festival

Have you marked your calendar for LMOA's Fall Festival yet? This year's event takes place on Saturday, November 7, beginning at 2 PM! Join the fun with a Cornhole Tournament and Basketball Free Throw Contest, take a hayride, climb aboard a fire truck, shop local vendors, and learn more about LMOA and Fluvanna County clubs and groups. Enjoy fun crafts, live music, face painting, cotton candy, dirty sodas, delicious food, hot cider, and so much more. There's something for everyone, so bring the whole family and spend a fun-filled afternoon at the Lake!

Interested in having a table for your group, club, or business at our Fall Festival? Email Melissa Kalinosky at mkalinosky@lmoa.org for more information or to secure your spot, today!



Mark Your Calendar for Fall Fun!

- **October 17:** Witches & Wizards Paddle
- **October 17-18:** Arts of Fluvanna County Studio Tour
- **October 24:** Piedmont Area Tennis Association (PATA) Free Kids Day at Ashlawn Tennis Courts. Kona ice!
- **October 25:** EarthQuest Presents: Raptors/Birds of Prey courtesy of the Wildlife Committee
- **October 30:** YRF Committee's Annual Bunker Pumpkin Walk for Lake Residents.
- **October 31:** Halloween at the Bunker Bistro! Music by F.O.G.
- **November 7:** LMOA Fall Festival
- **December 12:** Five-Oh! Club Holiday Market at Ashlawn Clubhouse

advertorial
Content: LMOA

Letter to the Editor

Time to Talk about Prostate Cancer

The American Cancer Society (ACS) has designated September as Prostate Cancer Awareness Month. According to the ACS, prostate cancer is the most common non-skin cancer diagnosed in men in the United States, and the second leading cause of cancer death in American men, trailing only lung cancer. The ACS estimates that about 1 in 8 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetimes, and an estimated 36,000 will die from the disease in 2026.

I am a 25-year prostate cancer survivor. I attribute my survival primarily to early detection of the disease, which was discovered by reviewing gradually increasing PSA (prostate-specific antigen) levels in routine blood samples taken during my annual health check-ups in my mid-late 50's. PSA is a protein produced by both normal and cancerous cells in the prostate. Increases in PSA levels above a patient's baseline or "normal" levels can indicate the possible presence of prostate cancer. In my case, my increasing PSA levels led to discussions with physicians, more definitive testing, and, ultimately, a decision for treatment that was successful in eliminating the cancer.

The ACS recommends that men meeting the following criteria discuss prostate cancer screening (PSA tests) with their health care provider:

- Beginning at age 50 for men who are at average risk of prostate cancer and are expected to live at least 10 more years;
- Beginning at age 45 for men at high risk of developing prostate cancer. This includes African American men and men

who have a first-degree relative (father or brother) diagnosed with prostate cancer at an early age (younger than age 65); and

- Beginning at age 40 for men at even higher risk (those with more than one first-degree relative who had prostate cancer at an early age).

Based on my experience as a patient, survivor, and 10-year coordinator of a prostate cancer support group soon after my treatment, I would add emphasis to the ACS recommendations. If you fall within the criteria listed above, TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT GETTING A PSA TEST. Early detection of prostate cancer is extremely important to the quality of life and the life expectancy of a man diagnosed with the cancer. It provides him the widest array of treatment options (which have expanded over recent years), including just monitoring the progress of the disease without deciding on an immediate course of treatment. I have interacted with many patients/survivors over the years. Those whose disease was discovered and treated before it spread to adjacent organs or metastasized, and who took advantage of the treatment choices then available to them, were all doing well. Those whose cancer had spread beyond the prostate when discovered and whose treatments options were therefore very limited, were still suffering from the effects of the disease and the effects of their ongoing treatments.

For more detailed information about prostate cancer, talk to your doctor or visit the ACS website at <https://www.cancer.org>.
-Andy Ringgold, Lake Monticello

The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- 1 Out of juice
5 Babe Ruth was its "sultan"
9 False friends
14 Doing nothing
15 Read (over)
16 Makeshift money
17 Rx unit
18 Hertz rival
20 Spelunking sight
22 Slushy drink
23 Item on a to-do list
24 Mark who played Crowley in "Supernatural"
26 "If you ask me," in a text
28 Blood clotting aid
30 Cattle owners
32 Beach sights
36 Where a zoom gets you
37 Run, as a business
39 Golf legend Sam
40 ____ of mind
41 Serious warning
44 Electric unit
45 Early plastic
48 Waller or Domino
50 They can take a yoke
51 Layered ice cream
55 ESP user?
57 Dial follower
58 Louisiana wetland
59 Clothing line?
60 Containers for ashes
61 Street talk
62 Blows it
63 Wet septet

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	13
14					15					16				
17					18				19					
20				21							22			
			23				24			25				
26	27			28		29								
30			31							32		33	34	35
36								37	38					
39							40							
				41		42	43					44		
45	46	47							48	49				
50					51			52					53	54
55				56							57			
58						59					60			
61						62					63			

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- 3 Just like that
4 Mason's Street?
5 Small spots
6 "This ____ hurt a bit"
7 Monet and Manet
8 Sprout canines
9 Pill bottle letters
10 Daily reading, for some
11 Lucas's sis on "Stranger Things"
12 Stair separator
13 Dash display
19 It holds the line
21 Hades flower
25 Statue support
26 Part of the eye
27 "Death in Venice" author
29 "What ____ the odds?"
31 Former WNBA player Layshia
33 Micro retailer
34 Make an impression?
35 Appear
37 Mine yield
38 Puts on a show
40 Attorney, at times
42 Wine's partner
43 Captain's command
45 Fails miserably
46 Type of rotation
47 Nairobi's land
49 Welliver of "Bosch"
52 Juicy fruit
53 Tolstoy heroine
54 Sad ending?
56 Toupee

Answers to Previous Crossword:

R	A	B	B	I		T	E	S	S		A	L	M	S
A	C	U	R	A		E	L	A	L		M	A	I	L
P	A	L	I	N	D	R	O	M	E		O	S	L	O
S	I	L	T		E	M	P	O	W	E	R	I	N	G
		D	O	L	L	I	E	S		Y	I	K	E	S
O	R	O	N	O		T	R	A	C	E	S			
F	E	Z			T	R	E	S		A	T	T	L	E
F	L	E	S	H	E	S			C	L	O	S	I	N
S	Y	R	I	A	N		S	I	L	O		B	O	O
		C	R	E	S	T	S		T	R	E	S	S	
N	I	C	K	I		K	U	T	C	H	E	R		
E	L	A	B	O	R	A	T	E	S		F	A	R	E
W	O	R	E		A	T	T	R	I	B	U	T	E	D
E	N	I	D		T	E	E	N		A	T	E	I	N
L	A	B	S		E	R	R	S		H	E	D	D	A

SUDOKU

Edited by Margie E. Burke

Difficulty: Easy

		6						3
					5	7		
2						5	4	
	1	9		5				
						2		
5					7	6		1
			1				8	
		7					3	
9	6	3	4					

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HOW TO SOLVE:

Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

3	6	9	4	2	7	5	8	1
5	7	4	1	6	8	3	2	9
2	8	1	3	5	9	7	6	4
6	2	8	7	9	4	1	5	3
4	3	7	6	1	5	2	9	8
1	9	5	8	3	2	6	4	7
7	4	6	5	8	1	9	3	2
9	1	3	2	4	6	8	7	5
8	5	2	9	7	3	4	1	6

Community Calendar

Cash, food accepted

Fluvanna Leaders for Race & Diversity (FLRD) is located at 14455 James Madison Highway in Palmyra. It is open on **Tuesdays and Thursdays** from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. It accepts cash and food donations. (434) 987-1938.

Food Pantry & Food Assistance

FLRD Community Food Pantry is located at 14455 James Madison Hwy, Palmyra VA in the School Board Administration Building. To receive food please visit our pantry on Tuesdays and Thursday from 10am to 2pm. Questions or donations, contact (434) 987-1938.



QR Code provided by the Fluvanna Leadership Development Program

Happy Birthday,
E.W. Thomas

The E.W. Thomas Market celebrated its centennial year in business with a well-earned birthday bash on Sunday, Sept. 20. Hundreds of well-wishers turned out to enjoy food, prize giveaways, wine tastings, and more. And because no business makes it to 100 without knowing how to multitask, the store remained open for regular Sunday shopping throughout the event.

This Palmyra institution was founded in 1926, when Edward Thomas Sr. opened E.W. Thomas

General Store. In 1969, his son, E.W. Thomas Jr., moved the business to its current location. Still family-owned, the store is now operated by the third generation: Beth, Linda, Lee, and Ann.

Over the decades, E.W. Thomas has become known for its fried chicken, served as a first job for generations of young Fluvannians, and quietly supported the surrounding community. The day's gathering celebrated more than a long-running grocery store. It honored a century 100 of family, service, and deep community roots.



Photos taken by Heather Michon and Lynn Stayton-Eurell

SALE DATES

SEPT. 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

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• DAILY

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• LUNCH

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6 | FLUVANNA REVIEW | SEP 24 – 30, 2026

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Film explores letters from the enslaved

BY PAGE H. GIFFORD
ARTS & CULTURE CONTRIBUTOR

The Words They Left Behind: Letters From the Enslaved, a documentary film by Horace Scruggs III, will be shown Sept. 27 at 3 p.m. at Palmyra United Methodist Church.

The film chronicles the creation of the Fluvanna Historical Society’s exhibition featuring letters written by people enslaved at Bremono Plantation.

Using these documents and conversations with descendants and historians, Scruggs explores the preservation of enslaved people’s voices and the enduring effects of forced migration and family separation.

Scruggs highlights the exhibit of

the same name at the Old Stone Jail Museum in Palmyra. Curated by the Fluvanna Historical Society, the exhibit details the lives and relationships of people enslaved by the Cocke family at Bremono’s three plantations during the 19th century, told through their own words.

“Many of the enslaved workers at Bremono Plantation were literate, and the Fluvanna Historical Society’s collection of their letters is incredible,” Scruggs said. “The contents of these letters include writings to their family members who had been sold states away, and to their enslavers. The letters also document these remarkable people’s everyday lives and their history in their own words.”

The exhibit features letters from five African Americans enslaved by the Cocke family: Kiesiah Moss, Peyton Skipwith, Lucy Nicholas,

Jack Creasy and Lucy Skipwith. The film also features their direct descendants, including members of the Creasy and Scruggs families.

“The broader descendant community that still resides in Fluvanna includes Smith, White, Hill and Adams. A direct descendant of John Hartwell Cocke is also featured,” Scruggs said.

The letters were among the writings the Fluvanna Historical Society obtained from the Bremono Trust. Others were found in the Cocke family papers at the University of Virginia’s Special Collections Library.

Peyton Skipwith and his family moved to Liberia in 1835 after Bremono plantation owner John Hartwell Cocke freed him. They wrote more than 50 letters to Cocke describing their health and the dif-

ficulties of building a new life in Africa. The Skipwith family corresponded with Cocke for more than 30 years. The University of Virginia Library archives their letters, but Cocke’s replies have been lost.

Along with Peyton’s letters, the collection includes correspondence from his brother George and his daughter Lucy, who were sent to Cocke’s Alabama cotton plantation rather than to Liberia. George had been sent to Alabama to prepare for emancipation and migration to Liberia. Ultimately, Cocke decided he was not “sufficiently mature” to be freed, and George remained enslaved there for the rest of his life.

The film will be shown at locations throughout Virginia, including the Virginia Museum of History & Culture on Saturday, Oct. 3.



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Supervisors press Expedition officials on water, noise and power line

BY HEATHER MICHON
EDITOR

Representatives for Tenaska's Expedition Generation power plant appeared before the Board of Supervisors on Wednesday night, where they were pressed on the switch to dry cooling, plans for a new transmission line, and whether the county understood the full scope of the proposed gas-fired power plant when it approved it in March.

Since receiving county approval, the company has filed state applications for an air permit and a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN). Representatives said they filed a wastewater discharge permit application with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality shortly before Wednesday's meeting.

Much of the discussion focused on Tenaska's decision to use dry cooling rather than the water-intensive cooling system discussed during the county review.

Tenaska said dry cooling, which uses fans rather than water to cool the plant, would reduce water use by more than 85% and eliminate the need to build a 17-mile pipeline and a new intake station on the James River.

Company representatives said the earlier water figures of 6-7 million gallons drawn from the James per day represented a worst-case wet-cooling design. They also maintained that the noise studies and visual simulations presented to the county considered both the wet- and dry-cooled systems.

Several supervisors questioned why the final cooling decision was not made until after the special use permit was approved.

Tenaska representatives cited cost and performance studies and the limited capacity of the existing water system. Shifting to dry cooling also opens the opportunity to bring the plant online sooner.

"You didn't know this well before?" Cunningham supervisor Chris Fairchild.

"No," the Tensaka representative replied. "We don't have all the answers on Day One for these projects. It takes a significant amount of engineering to get the information."

Residents and supervisors also raised concerns about construction water. Tenaska said it would not use wells on the project site for construction, although it could use well water for restrooms, handwashing, and similar potable purposes.

The company offered to memorialize changes in a memorandum of understanding with the county. County Attorney Dan Whitten said the restriction might instead be added to the special-use permit as a minor amendment, potentially creating enforceable conditions without requiring another public hearing.

Noise remains a significant point of contention. Residents asked the company to fund continuous mon-

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itoring near neighboring homes, arguing that periodic testing might miss short but disruptive events.

Tenaska declined to make that commitment, saying permanent monitors could also register unrelated sounds like airplanes and road traffic and could not, by themselves, establish whether the plant was violating county standards.

Representatives did acknowledge that startup and shutdown could be the facility's loudest periods and that water cooling is generally quieter, but argued silencers and other engineering controls would allow the dry-cooled plant to meet the county noise abatement requirements.

Tenaska said it has acquired or obtained options on approximately 250 to 300 additional acres around the site. Tenaska described the property as additional visual and sound buffer, although representatives said portions could also carry transmission, water, gas, or access easements.

The company also provided new details about the project's electrical infrastructure, which will include an on-site substation and an approximately 1.8-mile, 500-kilovolt transmission line connecting the new plant to the existing Cunningham substation.

Tenaska said the line would remain on company-owned property and would not connect to the proposed Valley Link transmission project. However, its exact route has not been finalized.

Some supervisors said they did not remember a detailed public discussion of the substation or transmission line during the county's review. Tenaska and county staff said both were shown in application materials and covered by the project's restrictive covenants.

Public comment was dominated by residents who argued that the county approved the plant before its full impacts were known. Speakers called for baseline air and well testing, continuous noise monitoring, stronger construction traffic controls and additional review of the transmission facilities.

In a separate action later in the meeting, supervisors unanimously approved new zoning rules requiring special-use permits for electrical substations, switching stations and related transmission facilities. The SCC retains authority over Valley Link's proposed transmission-line routes; counties can regulate the supporting facilities needed to operate them.

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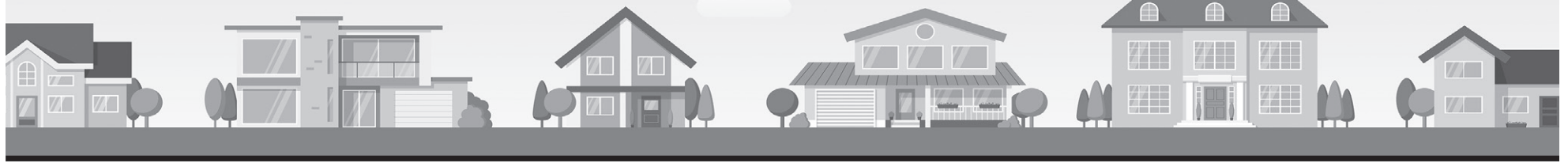
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Presented by Fluvanna County Extension Master Gardeners

Fall

GARDENING GUIDE

A Note from Kathleen Brunke, President

Fluvanna County Extension Master Gardeners

Welcome to the Fluvanna Fall Garden Guide! This is our first-ever attempt to bring our gardeners an extensive range of information and ideas all in one place. We are extremely grateful to Heather Michon, Publisher and Editor of *Fluvanna Review*, for working so closely with our team to present you with this guide.

Your Fluvanna County Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) wrote all of the informative articles on these pages. In addition to their personal advice and observations, each has provided you with references for continuing information, either research-based articles by Cooperative Extension writers or from sources that they have come to find usually reliable. We have covered many common questions we've received at our help desk in these articles, but if you have other questions, drop a note on our website, check your topic at www.ext.vt.edu, or search for researched information from other extension services around the country.

The coordination and editing of this garden guide have been under the direction of E. Dianne Campbell, EMG. We are also very appreciative of Rick Hernandez, Fluvanna County's Extension Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources, who gave his time and expertise to review the articles for errors and omissions.

As you will see in the following pages, our volunteers are interested in a wide variety of topics and come together to advance interests and horticultural education specific to our local ecosystem. If this inspires you to join us in our interests and endeavors, we invite you to become a member of our 2027 Master Gardener Training Class beginning in January. Further information is noted in the following pages.

We hope you find this Fall Garden Guide interesting and useful. Then, go out and play in the dirt!

Happy Gardening,

Kathleen

FALL VEGETABLES FOR A HEALTHY WINTER

BY VICKI BUFFMIRE, EMG

Fall is the time to plant vegetables that differ from those we choose for our summer garden. Many leafy green lettuces, Asian greens, and root vegetables grow only during the cooler autumn months. Some will even continue to grow into winter if covered with fabric, plastic row tunnels or cold frames. Now is the time to plan and decide what you would like to grow.

The recommended planting dates for specific vegetables are calculated using the dates for the plant to mature before the first frost date. Fluvanna has both Zones 7A and 7B, according to the USDA plant hardiness map. The Virginia Tech Cooperative Extension website provides excellent specific planting information by crop and zone in its publication *Virginia's Home Garden Vegetable Planting Guide: Recommended Planting Dates and Amounts to Plant*. It is a valuable and easily followed reference which is noted below.

Our expected first frost date is October 25. At 10 to 12 weeks before October 25, you can sow seeds for beets, carrots, onions, and quick peas. At six to eight weeks before October 25, you can sow seeds for lettuces, kale, spinach, chard, radishes, turnips, and Asian greens such as bok choy, mizuna, and mustard greens. And at four weeks before, sow seeds for radishes again, arugula, and more spinach. With plant covers, carrots, collards, Swiss chard, snow peas, and kale will last into December.

Seed packets will provide instructions for when to plant, how to plant, and expected days to maturity. Follow the seed packet instructions, probably selecting the varieties with the shortest

time from planting to harvest. But it is wisest to check the Home Gardening Vegetable Planting Guide, because the specific date range windows vary quite a bit by region for each specific crop.

All these autumnal crops are companion plants and can be planted together. Companion planting is a practice both ancient and modern in which certain crops help each other grow through partnerships, and they mutually benefit each other by improving the soil, suppressing weeds, and deterring pests

First, check the soil

As you prepare your garden beds for planting, consider testing the soil. This should be done about every three years to make certain you have the right pH and nutrients needed for optimal plant growth. The pH level in your soil affects the availability of nutrients to plants. Most vegetables will grow well in a soil with a pH of 6.2 to 6.8. (Other detailed informative articles on soil testing are provided in these pages.) In the meantime, the use of compost, aged animal manure, or small amounts of complete fertilizer (10-10-10) is beneficial for supporting plant growth and replacing the soil nutrients depleted from growing spring and summer crops.

When starting to plant, make sure the garden soil is loose and moist. Soil that is dried, cracked, and compacted from summer heat inhibits seed germination and the establishment of transplant roots. Plant your seeds and transplants after watering the day before or if there has been a good rain.

After the seeds have germinated, apply organic mulch 2 to 3 inches below the leaves of the plants in order to retain soil moisture and reduce water demands. You can use shredded leaves, pine needles and bark, or straw.

Deep watering of the garden bed is preferred over frequent light applications. That is, 2/3 gallon will deliver 1 inch of water per square foot of soil. Avoid overhead watering during times the foliage will remain wet, such as in the late evening, as that can promote plant diseases.

Be alert for frost

Pay attention to the weather updates for expected frost conditions. Some summer crops such as tomatoes, summer squash, melons, eggplants, cucumbers, peppers, and okra cannot withstand the first frost and need to be harvested immediately. If temperatures are predicted to remain 30°F, or above, you can use covers such as baskets, buckets, burlap, boxes, blankets, or row covers to protect the immature fruit of your plants until harvest.

However, your cool season crops of Brussell sprouts, bunching onions, carrots, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, parsnips, and spinach can withstand colder temperatures into the winter.

There are valuable sources of further information and details that are helpful for fall vegetable gardening. A few that I rely on include:

Virginia Cooperative Extension Gardener Handbook which is a free, open-access online textbook by Virginia Tech; Virginia's Home Garden Vegetable Planting Guide: Recommended Planting Dates and Amounts to Plant. <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/>; Soil Preparation Publication 426-313, from Virginia Tech; Schickler, R. D. (2024) *Companion Planting for Beginners*, RDS Publishing; Old Farmer's Almanac, 2026. "When and How to Fertilize Your Garden," <https://www.almanac.com/how-fertilize-your-vegetable-garden>.

GROWING GARLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME

BY VICKI BUFFMIRE, EMG

Garlic is one of the staples that most cooks would not do without. Fresh garlic is usually what they prefer for true seasoning. And, once they have grown their own, they will readily recognize unique differences. So, when planning a kitchen garden, garlic should be on the planting schedule.

Fall is the best time to plant garlic in our growing zone which includes both 7A and 7B.

There are two main types of garlic, hard-neck and soft-neck. What is known as Elephant garlic is actually a member of the leek family, has the largest cloves and a very mild flavor, but is grown under different conditions. For this article we will concentrate on the hard-neck and soft-neck varieties.

Research from Southern Exposure Seed Company explains that hard-necked garlic is better suited for more northern climates because it prefers consistently cold winters and long, cool springs. Other differences are that



the mature hard-neck garlic head has larger cloves than the soft-neck varieties, but does not store as long. The cloves surround a hard stem (the hard neck) in the middle that develops from a flower stalk that emerges among the leaves in late spring. Growers here frequently recommend Music, German Extra Hardy, Romanian Red, and Chesnok Red.

Soft-necked garlic is more suited for more temperate climates such as ours because it does not bolt easily and adapts to the frequent variations of our winter. It has leaves rather than a scape. Its cloves are more numerous and smaller, and they store longer. Soft-neck garlic varieties frequently chosen in our zone are Inchelium Red, California Early, Nootka Rose Silverskin, and Siver Rose Silverskin.

Seed garlic can be available for purchase at locations such as local farmers' markets and from nearby garden centers and nurseries such as Forrest Green Farms and Southern Exposure Seed Exchange in Louisa.

The Silverskin varieties are the type most often found on supermarket shelves due to their very long storage life. While it can be done, planting store-bought garlic for planting can have unpredictable results due to the growers' use of chemical treatments to limit sprouting, the original growing climate, the storage methods, and the garlic's age.

Research has shown that garlic grows best in well-drained, loose (not compacted), sandy soil. Consider amending the soil again if you are planting it in a bed used for production during the previous spring and summer. For best results, do a soil test to get evidence-based recommendations on the nutrients needed in your garden bed. Virginia Cooperative extension recommends 10-10-10 at specific rates, with a pH target between 6.2 and 6.5. If you don't have time, use compost to provide essential nourishment for establishing a good root system in the garlic over the winter. It is preferable to work in well-aged, fully finished compost prior to planting, rather than adding fresh compost during the growing season.

Plant the garlic before the first hard frost, which in Fluvanna is from mid-October to mid-November. Wait to separate the cloves from the heads until you are ready to plant, being careful to keep the skin on them to prevent rotting. Planting guidelines from Virginia Cooperative Extension begin with choosing the largest, firmest cloves. Plant them with the flat edge (the root plate) down in a hole 3 to 4 four inches deep, with the pointed end covered by 1 inch of soil. Plant the cloves 4 to 5 inches apart between rows of 12 to 24 inches apart. Water the planted garlic well. Mulch the planted garlic with a 3- to 4-inch-deep layer of straw, shredded leaves, or small wood chips, and then water everything again.

In the winter, keep the soil and the mulch moist over the garlic. Remove any weeds. Continue to

In June, the hard-neck garlic sends up a curling stalk with a flower bud at the end, a "scape." Cut the green stalk when the scape is tightly curled and most tender, before the stalks straighten. The garlic bulb will continue to grow without it. The garlic scape is a delicious vegetable, and can be used in various recipes easily found on the internet. Leaving the scape to flower will reduce the size of the garlic head.

Prepare to harvest the garlic once $\frac{1}{3}$ of the bottom leaves start to turn brown and wither. Remove the mulch and stop watering for two weeks. Harvest when the soil is dry, using a trowel to loosen the soil around the garlic plant. Gently pull the plant out by the leaves and shake off the excess soil from the roots. Do not wet the garlic bulb to remove the soil, instead, let the soil dry over the papery skin.

Cure the garlic in a covered, dry, well-ventilated space. I've been successful with both hanging it in bunches or laying it out flat on newspaper, for at least two weeks to one month. After the curing is done, peel the soiled outer leaves over the garlic head, trim the roots close to the root plate at the bottom, and cut the stalk one to two inches above the garlic head. Store the garlic in a paper bag, in a cool, dark place until ready to use.

Be sure to set aside the garlic heads with the largest, unblemished cloves for planting next fall.

Science-based information on growing garlic can be found in the publication, "Onion, Garlic, and Shallots" by D. Relf and A. McDaniel, from the Virginia Cooperative Extension website, <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu>. Another excellent source is "Garlic & Perennial Onion Growing Guide" by Jeff McCormack et al, with Southern Exposure Seed Exchange (www.SouthernExposure.com).



FALL IS TOOL MAINTENANCE TIME

BY BETTY LOVING, EMG

The yard work and gardening are finally over for the season. It's time to kick back and relax.

But wait! There's one more job to do. Just one tiny task that will reap great benefits for you in the spring. You will thank yourself when it's spring gardening time again.

Lay out all of the tools you used for the spring and summer. Take stock. Maybe there are some you don't use anymore and can discard. Is there something new out there with a more ergonomic grip, or longer handles so you don't have to reach as far? Hmmm.

But for all those tools that you are keeping, tackle the job now.

- Clean off all the mud and dried-on soil. It could be that the soil is harboring bacteria

- Check all wooden handles. Are they rough and splintered enough to merit replacing? Or perhaps they just need a good sanding and perhaps varnishing. Then tighten everything so they'll be sturdy and reliable use in the spring.

- Check all metal parts. Are there any signs of rust? Probably all could use some sand to remove signs of possible rust. Then take some time for sharpening. Especially the edges on clippers and loppers. Some might need to be taken apart to get to the blades for a proper sharpening, but it's worth the time to figure out how to dismantle and reassemble them. Shovels, hoes, and spades should all be sharpened to be functioning at their best.

- Once everything is clean, sharpened properly, and tightened, wipe them down with oil for protection from rust until next spring. Now you're ready to store them away for the winter.

Now you can kick back and relax, knowing that you've done your part to keep your tools last longer.

And, you will thank yourself in the spring when you reach for a shovel or those clippers and find they are in great shape and ready to go!

Detailed information is available on the internet with the search term "Garden tool care – Extension Service Guidelines."



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THIS FALL CREATES NEXT SUMMER’S PERFECT LAWN

BY E. DIANNE CAMPBELL, EMG

So, had a bumper crop of crabgrass this summer, did ya? Tried all sorts of strategies and the lawn still looks ratty? Maybe even risked the neighbors’ derision, crawled around, and dug out clumps by hand? (I’ve done that.)

The good news is that now is the perfect time to create a great looking lawn for next summer. It’s a matter of knowing the science of turfgrass, but it’s made simple by Dr. Mike Goatley, Virginia Tech professor, Extension turfgrass specialist, and an instructor in the Fluvanna Master Gardener training program.

The cool months of early to mid-fall are the optimal time of year for growing the grasses most commonly used in home lawns here – perennial ryegrass, tall fescue, and Kentucky bluegrass. While a few homes in our area have warm-season lawns such as bermudagrass or zoysia grass, for the majority, the warm summer months should be considered the optimal growing periods for warm-season annual weeds such as crabgrass.

By taking advantage of the peak growing months for cool-season grasses, we can create a thick, dense lawn that out-compete the weeds, Professor Goatley assures. From early to mid- fall—September through early November – the growth rate of our cool-season grasses is rebounding from the struggles of summer. The grasses will have a surge of root and shoot development with the cooling temperatures, and by way of creating food through photosynthesis, they will better survive the winter season. Next spring, efforts to improve the lawn in the fall will really show the results.

Seed, fertilize, stop mowing

Now is the optimal time to aerate lawns and sow seeds so that they have time to germinate, develop a root system, and produce their first shoot growth. Fall aeration relieves soil compaction and improves the flow of water, air, and nutrients for better growing conditions and stronger root systems. Building a thicker, healthier lawn is THE best means of weed control, far better than any pesticide you can apply, Prof. Goatley emphasizes

This is also the ideal time to apply nitrogen (N) fertilizer. While light fertilizing is beneficial in early spring, it should be only ¼ of the annual amount planned for the total lawn area, with the remaining ¾ scheduled for the fall months. Remember, this is the optimal growing time for our cool season grasses.

It’s also time to lighten up on the mowing schedule, since the grasses are not putting their energy into growing tall, but rather into storing food and developing stronger roots. Throughout the whole mowing season, however, it is always important to remember to keep the mower blade sharp and well-balanced, and to cut no more than 1/3 of the leaf blade. Mulching mowers are desirable, since they recycle the cut grass to create natural fertilization. And, to a point, mulching mowers are an effective way to manage autumn leaf drop from deciduous trees by chopping the leaves into fine pieces that further decompose and become organic matter for the soil.

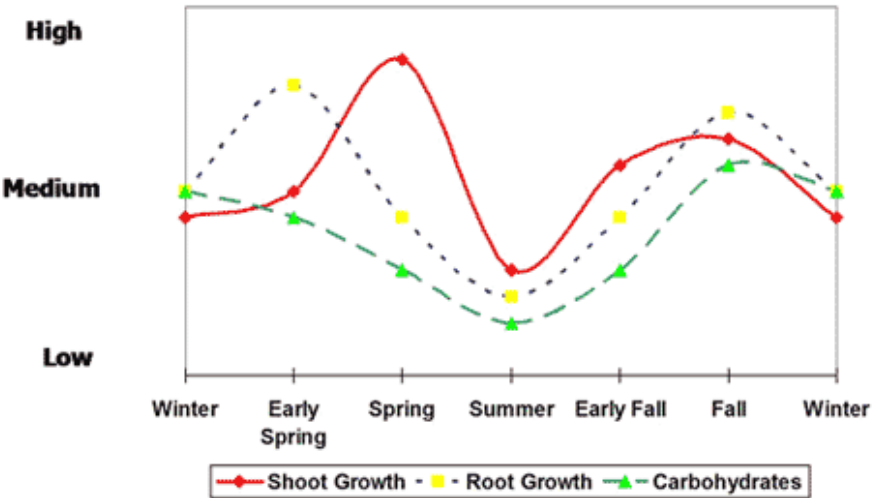
Many science-based tips on creating the perfect home lawn are available in informative and entertaining videos that have been created by Dr. Goatley and his team at Virginia Tech. They are available by simply going to the search bar with “VCE YouTube Channel Calling Dr. Turf.” The humor makes the mistakes we’ve all made seem less painful.

There are many in-depth lawn care articles available for public access through the Virginia Cooperative Extension site, www.ext.vt.edu, click on “Home grounds and animals,” and type in your topic in the search box. One of the best bits of advice I found among the research-based information on lawns was, “When to Call a Professional: Homeowners may waste more money and have fewer resources to draw from ... A general rule of thumb for hiring a professional is this: if you don’t enjoy working in your lawn and landscape, hire a professional.”

Having a picture-perfect lawn calls for continuing attention, especially during the Fall when supposedly all things green are going dormant. But, bear in mind that, as long as birds drop things and breezes carry seeds, the battle

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GET YOUR HOUSEPLANTS READY FOR WINTER

BY DEBORAH ADUNA, EMG

As temperatures drop and daylight hours become shorter, houseplants begin to experience noticeable changes to their leaves, flowers, and growth patterns. While they are sheltered from snow and freezing temperatures, they still face seasonal challenges that can affect their health and appearance. The bright, vigorous growth of summer slows during winter, and many plants enter a period of rest.

The good news is that a few simple adjustments can help indoor plants thrive throughout the colder months. By understanding how winter affects houseplants and making small changes to your care routine, you can keep your indoor garden healthy, attractive, and ready for a burst of new growth when spring arrives. A few simple tips from Virginia and North Carolina Extension services will help you and your houseplants thrive through the winter's dark days.

Winter brings major changes for houseplants. Shorter days mean plants receive fewer hours of sunlight. At the same time, home heating systems often reduce indoor humidity levels, creating conditions that can be stressful for tropical plants accustomed to warm, humid environments. Because of these changes, many plants naturally slow their growth. This means they generally need less water and fertilizer than they do during the summer growing season.

One of the most important winter tasks is maximizing available light. As the angle of the sun changes, a location that was bright in summer may become much dimmer in winter. Move plants closer to windows whenever possible, particularly south-facing windows, which typically receive the most sunlight during the colder months. Take time to rotate plants every week or two so all sides receive light evenly. This helps prevent the plants from leaning and encourages balanced growth. If your home receives limited natural sunlight, consider supplementing with grow lights. Even a simple LED grow light can make a significant difference for light-loving plants during the darkest months of the year.

Water less, avoid drafts

Be sure to adjust your watering routine during the winter months. Overwatering is the most common cause of houseplant problems during winter. Because plants grow more slowly, they use water less quickly. Soil that dries within a few days during summer may remain moist for a week or more in winter. Before watering, check the soil with your finger or soil tester. If the top inch or two is dry, it is usually time to water. Most houseplants are more likely to survive underwatering than overwatering during winter months.

Many popular houseplants originate in tropical regions where humidity levels remain high year-

levels to drop dramatically, sometimes leading to brown leaf tips, crispy leaf edges, and leaf drop. Fortunately, there are several ways to increase humidity around plants. Group plants together to create a naturally humid microclimate. You can also place pots on pebble trays filled with water, making sure the pots sit above the water level rather than directly in it. Although misting is sometimes thought to increase humidity, its effectiveness is doubtful unless repeated frequently throughout the day. If misting is utilized, it should be timed so that foliage dries by nightfall to avoid disease. For large collections of tropical plants, a room humidifier can keep your plants looking good.

Be sure to ensure your houseplants are not exposed to cold drafts from doors or windows, which can damage sensitive plants. Likewise, hot air blowing from heating vents can dry foliage and soil more quickly than expected. Try to position plants where they receive bright light without being exposed to sudden temperature fluctuations. Most common houseplants appreciate consistency preferring temperatures between 65-70°F daytime while nighttime temps can be 60-65°F.

Because growth slows in the winter months, most houseplants require little or no fertilizer. For most plants, reduce feeding significantly or pause fertilization altogether until spring. Plants that continue active growth under bright light may benefit from occasional light feeding, but for routine houseplant care, less is usually better during the winter.

Check plant health often during the winter. Dust can accumulate on leaves and reduce the amount of light plants absorb. Wipe larger leaves gently with a damp cloth and rinse smaller plants with water when appropriate. Inspect plants for common indoor pests or disease. Catching problems early is much easier than treating a larger problem later. Remove yellowing leaves and dead foliage to keep plants looking their best and to improve air circulation.

Think of winter as a season of maintenance rather than rapid growth. Your goal is not necessarily to encourage vigorous new growth but to help plants remain healthy until brighter days return. By providing adequate light, reducing watering, increasing humidity, and protecting plants from temperature extremes, you create the ideal environment for winter survival. When spring arrives, your plants will be ready to respond with fresh leaves, stronger growth, and renewed vigor.

For research-based information on caring for houseplants, access the following sites:

- <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/SPES/spes-804.html> “Properly Watering Container Houseplants,” SPES-804, Virginia Cooperative Extension, June 2026
- VCE Gardener Handbook, “Indoor Plants” Chapter 12
- <https://newhanover.ces.ncsu.edu> , North Carolina Cooperative Extension, “Winter Care

PERMISSION TO PROCRASTINATE ON FALL GARDEN CLEAN-UP

BY CINDY BETTINGER, EMG

Traditionally, fall garden “cleaning up” brings onerous tasks of raking and disposing of leaves, clipping dead stems, and removing seed heads for a tidy, well-maintained look. Well, consider this as permission to procrastinate on those chores we are advised by informative books and articles from reliable sources.

The decline of insects and bird populations has led to research showing that excessive clean-up removes habitat and food sources that are essential to survival of these native residents. The rallying call is “Leave the leaves!” but it also tells us to leave in stalks, stems, seed heads, and even dead twigs and branches when possible.

Many insects overwinter in leaf litter such as bumblebee queens, fireflies, and larval forms of butterflies and moths. Fireflies are beetles which live most of their lives in leaf litter, under rotting logs, and in moist areas. I can personally attest that since leaving more leaves on my property there has been a large increase in the number of fireflies I see on summer nights.

Many moths and butterflies rely on leaf litter to protect their eggs, caterpillars, and chrysalises. Their overwintering neighbors include lace bugs, snails, worms, beetles, millipedes, and spiders. If you need to remove the leaves, consider moving them to a pile in an inconspicuous area or create a compost pile. As a bonus, the decomposing leaves add nutrients to the soil, reduce the intensity of the freeze/thaw cycle, retain moisture, and discourage weeds.

Dead stems and logs

Standing dead stems are nesting chambers for many bee species such as small carpenter bees of the genus *Ceratina*, distinct from the larger wood-boring *Xylocopa* carpenter bees, and some moths and spiders take up residence in the stems as well. Procrastinate on pruning until late spring, or just let the stems naturally decompose. In the spring, allow these stems to remain and be covered by new growth to allow bees to emerge from this vertical nesting site. If your local standards object, cut stems to between 8 and 12 inches or lay them flat on the soil after cutting the base or just cut them to the base and let them lay flat on the soil.

Leaving dead stems of flowers' dried seed heads also offers food for birds over winter. Watching goldfinches feed on seed heads of coneflowers is one of my pleasures during fall and winter.

Fallen trees or stumps or even stacks of cut wood for use as fireplace or campfire fuel become burrowing chambers for insects, which also makes them a searching ground for woodpeckers and other birds. They create moist spaces for spiders, beetles, lizards and frogs, while the dead

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There are excellent books on making your home garden a wildlife friendly habitat; two of my favorites are *Bringing Nature Home* by Doug Tallamy and *Nature's Action Guide* by Sarah F. Jayne. A U. S. Fish and Wildlife article, "Winterize your pollinator garden" is available at www.fws.gov. Or try the following sites for more details:

- <https://gardens.si.edu/learn/blog/>, "Winter Garden Maintenance for Wildlife Friendly Habitats," Smithsonian Gardens, Sylvia Schmeichel, horticulturist, January, 2022
- <https://extension.psu.edu/fall-garden-care-for-pollinators>, Penn State Extension, "Fall Garden Care for Pollinators," Dianne Machesney, July 2026
- https://ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/SPES-799, "Native Plants in the landscape: Maintaining Native Plants," July 2026

FALL-PLANTED PERENNIAL BULBS FOR DEER-RESISTANT SPRING BLOOMS

BY REBECCA LEINEN, EMG

Bulbs planted in the fall create a colorful spring. And, to make them even better, most are deer-resistant.

The bulbs store energy that feeds bright blooms that peek out of their snug beds long before the ground warms and the tree leaves emerge. Many pop up even while snow is still on the ground. They brighten up drab, wintery days with bold colors, unusual shapes, and sometimes even wonderful fragrance. Since deer and rabbits rely heavily on scent and texture to identify food sources, critters often pass by spring-blooming bulbs like daffodils, hyacinths, and alliums. Some may perform differently depending on cultivar, drainage, climate, and animal pressure.



Spring-blooming bulbs prefer a sunny spot, but you can still plan your garden with a splash of early spring color in areas that become shady later in the season. In March or April many deciduous trees and shrubs are still leafless and will let through enough sunshine to allow fall-planted bulbs to spring up and flower. There are variations depending on location, as we can find in Cooperative Extension articles from Virginia and Illinois.

Planting later in the fall, closer to when the ground freezes, can also help to protect bulbs from being stolen by hungry chipmunks and squirrels. This may not be a reliable stand-alone deterrent, so to be safe, use granular repellents around the planting area for extra help deterring pests. Also be aware that later planting can conflict with root development.

Some of the favorite and most reliable blooms to plant in the fall include:

Daffodils are probably the best-known spring flowers, made even more popular here because they are deer resistant. Famously known for bright yellow blooms, there are varieties with different sized and colored cups, some in creamy white, with double blooms, or even miniatures. Many varieties have fragrance. Bloom times range from early to mid and late spring. Most range from 14 – 18" tall, miniatures are around 6-8".

Iris, Dutch or Bearded, typically bloom in late spring to early summer, depending on location and cultivar. Dutch iris grows from a true bulb, has tall, slender, grass-like leaves, and is commonly seen with narrow dark blue flowers, although varieties include white. Bearded irises grow from a rhizome and have sword-like foliage and large, showy, ruffled flowers atop a spike. Bearded iris come in a wide variety of colors and heights. Reblooming varieties grace both late spring and mid-fall. The rhizomes will multiply. Shallow planting is a plus.

Alliums add striking texture with globe-shaped blooms atop narrow stems. They come in a variety of blue, purple, white and pastels with bloom times from mid-spring to early summer. Some are up to 60 inches tall.

Hyacinths have saturated color of purple, pink, or white, and are highly fragrant. Although they are short in stature (6-12" high), they pack a big punch in the early to mid-spring garden.

Grape Hyacinth, aka Muscari, come in deep shades of blue and, at just 6-8" tall, are a great front border mid-spring complement to daffodils. (Usually deer-resistant, but that depends on how hungry they are.)

English Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) naturalize to form an early spring carpet under deciduous trees of undeniable blue that's just 14-16" high. Spanish bluebells and hybrids are also popular, so if the hope is for naturalizing, be careful in selection.

Plant spring-flowering bulbs after soil temperatures have cooled in fall, typically October through November in much of Virginia, while there is still enough time for roots to form before the

ground freezes. In warmer southeastern areas of the state, planting may extend into December.

When planting bulbs, position the larger flat end down and the point up in individual holes at three to four times the bulb's height, and space them about three times the bulb's width. If a bulb happens to land sideways in a planting hole, it will figure out which end is up.

If contemplating a larger installation or mass-planting, here's an alternative approach. Dig a trench about 8 inches deep and the width of your planting area/shape. Replace loosened soil over the bottom of the trench about 2 inches deep to allow for spacing and seating the bulbs upright. Stagger the bulbs spacing 3 inches apart with the pointed end up. Gently cover with the loose soil previously removed. Mulch and water in well to remove air pockets. This technique works especially well when planting large areas with heavy clay soil or rocks. It also works well when layering in smaller bulbs that are planted shallower so that you don't have to dig additional holes. Simply cover the larger, deepest planted bulbs with a layer of soil, then add the smaller, shallower planted bulbs (such as muscari) and cover with the final layer of soil.

After the flowers are spent with the progression of spring, it's important to allow the foliage to turn yellow naturally. While still green, the foliage collects energy for next year's blooming. Remove the yellowed foliage only when it pulls away easily from the bulb. Plan to camouflage the fading foliage by planting companions in advance using plants with large-leaved deer-resistant perennials such as ferns, hellebores, bleeding heart, peonies, salvia, catmint or lamb's ear.

- <https://extension.illinois.edu>, "Landscaping with Bulbs," <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-220>, "Patriotic Gardens: Bulbs for a Red, White and Blue Spring Garden" January 2026.
- Helpful information from commercial sources including Proven Winners, K. van Bourgondien bulbs, Holland Bulbs Farms, Brecks, Eden Brothers.

BRING YOUR GERANIUMS INDOORS FOR WINTER COLOR

BY DEBORAH ADUNA, EMG

Keep a touch of summer alive during the coldest winter months by bringing your annual geraniums (*Pelargonium* species) indoors. My personal experience has been reinforced with more knowledge from Cooperative Extension articles from Iowa and Wisconsin. Indeed, these are among the easiest outdoor flowers to bring indoors. With excellent light, careful watering, and occasional feeding, these beautiful plants may continue to grow and probably provide you with colorful blooms and fresh green foliage throughout the short dark days.

Be sure to move geraniums indoors before the first hard frost. Select healthy plants with



strong stems and good leaf color, then trim back leggy stems by about one-third to one-half and remove any dead flowers, yellow leaves, or damaged growth.

Buit before bringing it indoors, check for pests by inspecting the undersides of leaves and around stems for insects such as aphids, whiteflies, or spider mites. If needed, physically remove any pests. You can rinse your plants with water or, if necessary, use a product labeled for indoor ornamental plants, being sure to carefully follow label instructions.

If it has been growing in a container all summer, you may choose to repot it into a slightly larger container to give the root ball additional room to grow. Be sure to add fresh potting mix. If plants are in the ground, they can be dug up and placed into a pot for the indoor winter season.

Another way to overwinter geraniums is to take cuttings for new growth. Cut off a 3-inch section of a healthy plant’s non-flowering shoots. Remove the lower leaves and dip the cut end in a rooting hormone which can be purchased from most garden centers. Place the cutting in a clean rooting medium like peat moss, sand, or perlite and keep it moist. Give it bright, indirect light until it is well-rooted, approximately six weeks. Then transplant it to its own container filled with fresh potting soil and continue routine care.

Keep them sunny and warm

Be sure to choose the right indoor location. Geraniums love sunlight, and this is the most important factor for winter blooming. Place them in the brightest location available, ideally a south- or west-facing window. Geraniums generally need at least six hours of direct sun each day to bloom well.

Temperatures should remain comfortable, ideally with daytime temperatures between 65°F and 75°F (18°C–24°C). Slightly cooler nights are fine, but avoid exposure to temperatures below about 50°F (10°C). Also, be sure to avoid temperature shifts such drafts from doors and windows, as well as hot, dry air from heating vents. These can stress the plants and reduce flowering.

inch of soil to dry before additional watering. Overwatering is one of the most common problems with indoor geraniums. Fertilize only lightly during the winter, as plant growth slows during this time. After it has bloomed, remove the spent flower clusters promptly. If it starts getting leggy, pinch the tips of overly long stems to encourage bushier growth and more bloom sites. Be sure to monitor for pests and treat any problems early.

When the weather warms, harden off your geranium by moving it outside in the shade for a couple of hours every day. Slowly increase the time and the amount of light each day for about 2 weeks. Once the risk of a spring frost has passed, you can move it back outside to a new summer location.

Information specific to overwintering tender geraniums can be accessed at:

- <https://www.extension.iastate/linn/overwintering-geraniums>, and
- <https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/overwintering-tender-geraniums/>.

DIVIDING PLANTS TO GROW YOUR GARDEN

BY DEBORAH ADUNA, EMG

Dividing existing plants rather than buying additional plants can expand your garden or become gifts to friends. All it takes is a bit of effort to divide the large overgrown clumps of bulbs, rhizomes or roots that have been there a while and have multiplied naturally.

Once healthy plants have been in the ground for a few years, they naturally develop a more extensive root system or create new bulbs. Then they become overcrowded, tightly packed, produce fewer flowers, and simply outgrow their space. Crowding brings competition for nutrients and water and restricts airflow which can lead to diseases. So, they need to be divided and

relocated for healthy new growth and more vigorous blooming. I found that the timing may vary according to location, but the procedure remain the same, as I discovered in Cooperative Extension articles from Virginia, North Carolina and Minnesota.

Many popular Virginia garden plants benefit from periodic division. Because not all perennials form bulbs, rhizomes, or easily divided crowns, division works best for clump-forming herbaceous perennials. Irises and daffodils are well-known to improve blooming after division, however, the best time to tackle daffodil division is during summer months just following plant dieback when bulbs are easily located. Other summer blooming perennials such as daylilies, hostas, black-eyed Susans, bee balm, and ornamental grasses can benefit from division during the Fall months when the weather is relatively mild. Division and replanting should take place early enough for roots to establish before the soil freezes.

Spring can be a great time to divide some perennials as they put on new growth, are so easy to handle, and have the entire growing season to get re-established in your garden. As a general guideline, divide herbaceous perennials when they are not blooming, and the weather is mild. Plants in flower devote most their energy to reproducing and will have trouble dealing with the stress on their root systems involved with dividing and moving them. The best time for dividing and replanting varies by species so it’s best to find out the best timing for your plants.

To begin, choose a cool day and water the plant a day or two beforehand if the soil is dry. Using a garden fork or spade, dig around the entire plant several inches beyond the outer edge of the root system. Carefully lift the plant from the ground and shake or brush away excess soil so the roots, rhizomes, or tubers are clearly visible. If the plant has a large amount of foliage, trimming it back by one-third can help reduce moisture loss while the roots become established.



To divide the root systems, inspect the plant and identify natural separation points. Some plants, such as daylilies and hostas, can often be pulled apart by hand. Larger rhizomes or tougher root systems may require a sharp knife, pruning saw, or garden spade. Each new division should contain healthy roots and at least one growing point, crown, or fan of leaves. Remove and discard any dead, diseased, or damaged sections before replanting. Bearded iris, for example, grow offshoots outward from a central “mother” rhizome. Separate each of them and discard the mother.

Select a new planting site that matches the plant’s sunlight and soil requirements. Dig a planting hole large enough to comfortably accommodate the roots without crowding or bending them. Loosen the soil and mix in compost or organic matter to improve drainage and fertility. Place each divided plant section at approximately the same depth as it was growing before. Spread the roots naturally and backfill with soil, gently firming it around the plant to eliminate air pockets. Water thoroughly after planting and continue to provide consistent moisture for several weeks while the plant establishes itself. Apply a light layer of mulch to help conserve moisture and moderate soil temperature but be sure to leave a bit of space between the mulch and the plant’s crown to allow for air and water flow.

Dividing plants is one of the most economical ways to improve your landscape. A single mature perennial can often produce several healthy new plants, filling garden beds with color and texture at no additional cost. With a little digging and careful handling, overgrown plants can be transformed into vigorous new additions that will thrive for years to come. Whether you’re refreshing an established garden or expanding into a new area of the yard, division is a simple technique that keeps Virginia gardens healthy, productive, and beautiful.

Research-based information on the propagation of plants by division can be obtained from

the following sources: Virginia Cooperative Extension. (2025). *Propagation by cuttings, layering and division*, <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-002/426-002.html>; “How do I divide Perennials in my garden?” by Leslie Rose, North Carolina Extension, <https://forsyth.ces.ncsu.edu>; and “How and When to Divide Perennials,” Minnesota Extension, <https://extension.umn.edu>.

CREATE AN ALL-SEASON POLLINATOR GARDEN IN VIRGINIA

BY DEBORAH ADUNA, EMG

Imagine stepping into your garden on a warm spring morning and hearing the gentle hum of native bees among the flowers. Later in summer, butterflies drift from bloom to bloom while hummingbirds dart busily. By fall, migrating pollinators are still finding nourishment among late-season flowers. This vibrant scene is possible when you design your landscape with plants blooming from early spring to hard frost.

Pollinators are essential to sustaining and perpetuating many plants of our ecosystem, including fruits, vegetables, trees, and wildflowers, in addition to the flowers in our gardens. Bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds are the pollinators that first come to mind, but there is an extensive ecosystem of other creatures that carry life-sustaining pollen from plant to plant. Among them, beetles, flies, moths, wasps, and other insects are busily moving about this important business.

All pollinators face increasing challenges from habitat loss, pesticide use, and declining food sources. One of the best ways gardeners can help is by planting to provide nectar and pollen throughout the entire growing season.

Meet seasonal needs

Seasonal blooming differences matter, as different pollinators become active at different

times of the year. Early-emerging native bees need nectar in spring. Butterflies and hummingbirds thrive during summer. In late summer and fall, pollinators require energy reserves to prepare for winter survival or migration. A garden that blooms continuously creates a dependable food source for the many pollinators that are active seasonally. Think of your landscape as a relay race, with one group of plants handing off to the next as the seasons progress.

Spring is a critical time because food sources can be scarce when pollinators first emerge. Excellent early-season plants for Virginia gardens include Virginia Bluebells, Eastern Red Columbine, Creeping Phlox, and Golden Ragwort. Trees and shrubs such as Serviceberry, Viburnum, Flowering Dogwood and Eastern Redbud are especially valuable because they produce thousands of blossoms, providing abundant nectar and some of the richest pollinator resources available in a relatively small space. Native bees often rely heavily on these early blooms after a long winter. Other bees and pollinators are attracted to summer blooming Buttonbush and American Holly and Common Elderberry. Trees and shrubs add structure, privacy, and seasonal interest, but their true value is in supporting pollinators year after year as a food source and adding places to rest and nest.

As temperatures warm, pollinator populations expand dramatically and your garden can become a bustling wildlife habitat. Top summer bloomers include Purple Coneflower, Bee Balm (*Monarda fistulosa*), Black-Eyed Susan, Thread Leaf Coreopsis, and the varieties of Asclepias known as Butterfly Weed or Swamp Milkweed. The Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) deserves a place in nearly every Virginia pollinator garden. Not only does it provide nectar for numerous insects, but it also serves as the host plant for monarch butterfly caterpillars, and it’s the only plant they can eat.

Many gardens begin to fade in late summer, just when pollinators need food the most to help



support migrating butterflies and allow bees to build energy reserves before winter. Outstanding fall pollinator plants include Asters, Goldenrod, Joe-Pye Weed, and Sunflowers. Goldenrod is particularly valuable as a late-season nectar and pollen resource for pollinators.

An all-season pollinator garden offers more than beautiful flowers, it transforms your landscape into a living ecosystem filled with color, movement, and wildlife. By selecting plants that bloom in spring, summer, and fall, Virginia gardeners can create a continuous source of food for pollinators while enjoying a garden that remains attractive throughout the growing season. Whether you have a large backyard or a small planting bed, every Virginia native pollinator-friendly plant you include contributes to a healthier environment for all.

Helpful information on attracting pollinators to your backyard is easily available. One source is a Virginia Cooperative Extension article, “Creating Inviting Habitats,” by Northern Virginia Master Gardener Mary Free, at www.pubs.ext.vt.edu. Another is “Plant Natives to Attract Pollinators” from www.plantvirginianatives.org.

COLLECTING AND STORING SEEDS FOR YOUR FUTURE GARDEN

BY WHITNEY BEAIRD, EMG

Saving seeds from this summer’s garden will help you grow your favorite varieties next year. Just be sure they’re gathered from isolated open-pollinated plants so that you retain your favorite color, flavor, size, and productivity. It’s a great way to save money. And it builds your confidence as a gardener.

When I began gardening in 2018, Ms. Patsy, my friend’s grandmother, gave me some cow pea seeds to start with. I watched the plants grow and I was determined to save some seeds, just like Ms. Patsy had. I attempted different drying techniques. I left some pods to dry longer on the plant and other pods I strung up to dry inside, similar to the “leather britches” drying technique used with certain beans.

When I shelled the peas in the winter, the pods I left to dry on the plant had small bits of mold on the eyes of the peas. While they were dry at that moment, those pods were probably rained on or had some residual moisture left in there. I knew that those seeds would not be good for saving or eating, so I discarded them. The peas I had hanging received plenty of air flow that allowed them to dry out completely.

I was successful with my first pea seeds and have continued to grow them for generations. Now, the majority of my garden is grown from other seeds kept from previous years. I feel so much pride when I hear my peas hitting my bucket every summer, knowing that I played a part in that seed’s journey. Even though Ms. Patsy is gone, I can still grow and share those

For additional perspectives based on experience, I recently spoke with longtime gardener and fellow Fluvanna Extension Master Gardener, Rebecca Leinen. She shared some other techniques for dry seed collecting and the best way to store seeds for future planting.

How do you know when seeds are ready to be collected? I use the dry seed collection process to perpetuate my favorite garden plants. The flower must be completely dried out before cutting and saving for later processing. If the stem is dry, then it will likely have the most mature seed heads.

Are there some plants you should not try seed saving from? I save seeds only from my properly isolated open-pollinated plants. Hybrid varieties are attractive for a season, but not for seed saving because you cannot guarantee that the plant offspring will be the same as the parent plant.

Do seeds expire or are they good forever? It varies by crop and storage conditions. Seeds collected, saved, and stored in dry conditions may continue to germinate and grow for several years. An average viability for vegetable seeds is 2-4 years. Some flower seeds have been known to last for a much longer time.

How do you store your seeds? I still collect seeds from the garden using a large white mailing envelope that I label and set aside for processing later. After the chaff and other plant debris are removed, I use nifty small brown paper envelopes with a cellophane window so I can see the seeds’ condition. The other side of the envelope has areas for proper labelling so that I don’t forget what’s in it. I keep these in tightly closed containers or glass jars in the refrigerator where they are cool and there’s low humidity.

How do you stay organized and avoid “mystery seed” mix-ups? I have found the biggest mix-ups happen during collection in the garden. Before heading to the garden, I label my collection envelopes, rather than after I collect the seed heads. It also helps to remind me what seeds I want to collect.



For research-based information on seed collection practices, see the Virginia Cooperative Extension website, <http://ext.vt.edu> for the top “Seed for the garden,” or “Saving Your Own Seed.” Information on preserving beans and the leather britches process is available at <http://Extension.wvu.edu> under “Growing Beans in West Virginia.”

CARING FOR WINTER BIRDS: YOUR BACKYARD CAN BE A LIFELINE DURING COLD MONTHS

BY DEBORAH ADUNA, EMG

When winter settles across Virginia, many people assume the birds have flown south. Some species and individuals do migrate, but many remain throughout the colder months, relying on natural food sources and sheltered habitats to survive.

Food and water can become difficult for birds to find as temperatures drop and snow or ice cover the landscape. But thoughtful residents can make a tremendous difference by providing essential resources, create a winter-friendly environment, and help local bird populations survive until spring. Plus, they increase opportunities to observe wildlife up close.

Virginia remains home to a surprising variety of birds throughout the winter season. There are year-round residents plus varieties that arrive from northern regions seeking milder conditions. Familiar winter birds include Cardinals, Woodpeckers, Blue Jays, Finches, Juncos, and Mourning Doves. In addition, Hawks, Owls, and various waterfowl remain active throughout much of the state during the colder months.

One of the most interesting birds to observe during Virginia’s winter is the familiar red-breasted American Robin which has a remarkable adaptation. During the summer, robins hop across lawns as solos or in pairs, searching for worms and insects to feed themselves and their chicks. As autumn arrives and winter approaches, their behavior changes dramatically. They gather into flocks numbering in the hundreds, providing safety and helping them locate food more efficiently. Their diet also shifts from insects and worms to berries and other fruits, which are more plentiful during the colder months. In winter, American robins often shift to foraging in wooded areas and berry-producing shrubs rather than open lawns. Folks can help by occasionally sharing raisins, dried apples, grapes, fresh or dried cranberries, or shelled sunflower seeds scattered for these ground feeders.

Better yet, consider adding some natural food sources in your landscape. Plants providing winter food include Holly, Winterberry, American Beautyberry, Eastern Red Cedar, Viburnum, and Dogwood. Heads left standing on native wildflowers such as Coneflowers, Black-Eyed

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Feeders and natural sources

Birds require significantly more energy during winter to maintain body heat and survive long nights. Folks can provide nutritious food with feeders that can help supplement their natural diet. Black-oil Sunflower Seeds are the gold standard for winter bird feeding. Their high oil content provides valuable energy for a wide variety of species. Other excellent choices include shelled Sunflower Seeds, White Millet, Safflower Seeds, Peanuts (unsalted), and Mealworms. Suet Cakes are especially important during cold weather, as its rendered animal fat provides concentrated calories that help birds maintain body temperature during freezing conditions.

Bird feeders become gathering places for dozens of birds, so keep them well-stocked during winter months. To prevent disease transmission, make sure to remove wet or moldy seed, and clean feeders at least every two weeks by washing them in hot soapy water, rinsing them thoroughly, soaking them in a solution of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water, and letting dry naturally. Also, keep the area around the feeder clean by raking up seed hulls beneath feeders and washing the area clean with water if possible. Weeding or replacing soil with sand underneath the feeder makes this chore much easier. Regular cleaning under the feeder will also help deter pests, such as deer, squirrels, and mice that may be attracted to the area.

Winter water sources can be even more difficult for birds to find than food. Birds need water for drinking and feather maintenance year-round. When ponds and puddles freeze, available water becomes limited. A reliable source of unfrozen water can be valuable during freezing winter. Be sure to change the water regularly and break ice each morning if it's frozen, or purchase a small heater designed for this purpose. For ground feeders such as robins, a shallow pan of water on the ground will be welcomed.

Plant for protection

Winter snowstorms, freezing rain, and strong winds can be dangerous for birds. Dense vegetation and protective cover can help birds conserve energy and reduce exposure to the extreme elements. Consider adding evergreen trees and shrubs to your landscape, because

they provide year-round protection for wildlife. Brush piles also become mini-wildlife habitats, created from fallen branches which provide safe hiding places for small birds escaping predators and harsh weather. Additionally, clean nesting boxes can also provide essential shelter for some cavity nesting species during the winter months.

Supporting Virginia's winter birds does not require a large property or expensive equipment. A simple feeder, a source of fresh water, and a few protective shrubs can dramatically improve survival conditions for many species.

Research-based information on caring for birds in winter can easily be accessed from several online sources. Just type the subject in the search box at the following websites: www.pubs.ext.vt.edu; dwr.virginia.gov; extension.psu.edu; gardens.si.edu; and abcbirds.org.

FALL IS PLANTING TIME FOR TREES AND WOODY SHRUBS

BY E. DIANNE CAMPBELL, EMG

Fall is an excellent time to plant many trees and woody shrubs in Virginia. It is easy to overlook this planting time because we plant so many other things in spring. Cooler temperatures and typically adequate soil moisture can reduce water stress, while roots may continue growing as long as the soil remains unfrozen.

Early spring is also a suitable planting season when plants are dormant and soils are workable.

"Fall planting is much more likely to be successful because the tree is dormant" advises Walter Hussey, certified Tree Steward as well as Master Gardener and Master Naturalist. While deciduous trees still lose water because of the sun, called the transpiration process, it is reduced during Fall months. Plants also use stored energy to help them overwinter and heal wounds that can occur in winter. The energy focus is on root system development versus creating a canopy.

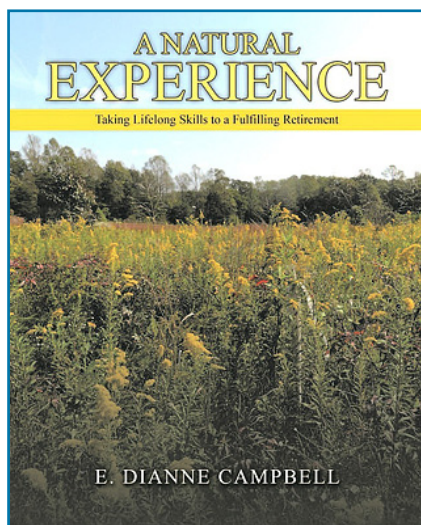
"When you plant trees in the fall, the soil is still warm and probably won't freeze hard for a long time. The soil will continue to be moist

with fall rain and winter snow, giving the roots a supportive environment" added Hussey.

Tree planting can begin with nursery planted young trees grown in a container, balled-and-burlapped plants or bare-root plants. The root ball that is balled-and-burlapped is very heavy and requires the investment of significant equipment to dig the hole and to manage transporting and placement. Important steps when planting this tree are to remove twine, wire baskets, and burlap from at least the upper portion of the root ball after the plant is positioned. Synthetic burlap must be completely removed. Container-grown plants are something that the average homeowner can manage alone. It is important to inspect the roots for circling, girdling, or matted roots. Loosen, straighten, or prune problematic roots before planting. Bare-root plants are handled most easily if roots are kept moist, shaded before planting and they are spread naturally in the hole avoiding bending them upward. Over five to 10 years, the growth results will be about equal, Hussey projects.

Once a planting site is selected, dig a planting hole two to three times wider than the root ball or the spread root system but no deeper than the root ball. For trees, locate the root flare—the point where the trunk broadens into the main roots—and position it at or slightly above the finished soil grade. Firm, undisturbed soil beneath the root ball helps prevent settling and overly deep planting. Spread the root system out as far as possible and backfill with the same soil. Tap the returned soil down firmly so that the roots have good contact.

Don't add enriched soil around the root, as this will encourage the roots to remain in the space of the enriched hole, rather than spreading. Do add compost 2-3 inches thick and 3 to 6 inches from the tree base on top of the soil so that the added nutrients slowly leach down. Then, mulch around the base to hold in moisture and protect from freezing. Leave a couple of inches of mulch around the trunk to help exclude rodents for a while before moving it away from the trunk. Consider protecting the trunk with a tree tube or wire fencing for protection from deer rubbing. Continue watering evergreens and newly installed trees during dry fall or winter weather whenever the soil is not frozen.



When lifelong problem-solvers Walter and Marie Hussey retire, they find fulfilling challenges to their skills with Fluvanna Master Gardeners and Pleasant Grove Park. Their shared their passions for learning, conservation, and community service transform their ideas into enduring improvements and educational programs, even as they face life-changing battles with cancer. Their journey is a reminder that it's never too late to make a difference.

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Woody shrubs, too

Follow the same process for planting woody shrubs. And consider investing in those that are especially beneficial to wildlife by producing berries during the winter. Matching plants to the planting site is key to avoid dooming the plants success before establishment begins.

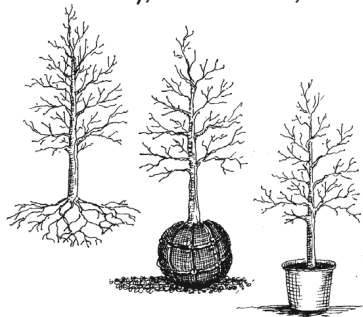
American holly or Christmas holly (*Ilex opaca*) and winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) are both members of the *ilex* family and are dioecious, meaning there must be male and female plantings to produce berries. The American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) makes a dramatic presence all winter long starting with magenta berries in the fall months. The highbush cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum*) offers spring flowers, vibrant fall foliage, and clusters of bright, red winter berries. The linden viburnum (*Viburnum dilatatum*) also offers bright red berries all winter long, but, as an introduced species native to eastern Asia, it tends to spread. In addition to adding a bit of color to dull days, their winter month berries are life savers to birds and small animals. Trees offering berries in fall and winter months include the Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) and the Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) whose pale blue fruits occur on female plants.

Whenever planting trees or woody shrubs, always be certain to work with a respected nursery or knowledgeable friend to source your planting stock. Do not disrupt established environs by taking plantings from natural woodlands.

Extensive information on the characteristics and care of a variety of trees and shrubs is available from the Virginia Cooperative Extension website under the topic heading “Trees, Shrubs, Groundcovers.”

<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-611/426-611.html>, “Selecting Landscape Plants: Flowering Trees” Pub. 426-611 (SPES 321P), Diane Relf, 2021.

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/426/426-702/426-702.pdf, “Planting Trees”, Pub. 426-702, 2017.



TO MULCH OR NOT TO MULCH: WINTER MULCHING

BY KATHLEEN BRUNKE, EMG

It’s getting cold outside, and some folks are talking about mulching. We know fall is the time to prune some plants and remove debris from the beds, but why mulch? Isn’t that only done in the spring?

People often forget that plant roots need

as well as the heat of a Piedmont summer. We remember that mulching helps the soil retain moisture in the summer and protects roots from drying out, but some plant roots are close to the surface, and cold can nip them just as it does buds and leaves. A layer of bark or woodchip mulch protects perennial and tree roots from freezing and thawing cycles, which can cause significant injury.

Mulch also prevents the soil from heaving in areas that freeze. This occurs when ice forms in air and moisture pockets in the soil. As freezing and thawing cycles happen, the soil, along with roots, is pushed toward the surface as the ice area increases, forming a raised, often jagged, area. A layer of mulch also helps prevent soil erosion due to wind and rain.

But when do we mulch, and what kind of mulch is best?

Remove weeds from the mulch zone so they don’t overwinter. Mulch in the fall, usually mid to late fall, before the soil freezes, depending on your growing zone. Most of us are in zone 7A or 7B, so the first frost is from late fall to early winter. You want to mulch after the first frost but before the ground freezes. The amount of mulch depends on what you are mulching and which mulch you are using. Bark and wood chips take less mulch than straw. For shrubs and trees with bark or wood chips, apply mulch 2-3 inches deep, starting 2-3 inches from the tree trunk (never pile it against the trunk) and extending 2-6 ft from the trunk. For plants you are trying to overwinter, mulch should be 1-2 inches deep, but don’t put any over the middle of the plant (the crown). It should go out about a foot from the plant. Never apply mulch so deep that rodents can overwinter in it and snack on the roots.

The type of mulch may vary depending on the plants. Hydrangeas, astilbe, coral bells, mums, and similar perennials generally have shallow roots, as do many trees. You can mulch with shredded bark or wood chips, garden straw, leaves, or evergreen branches. These materials help preserve beneficial microorganisms and provide nutrients as they break down. As an added bonus, mulch helps reduce weed growth in the spring. Please note that if you use garden straw, 6-8 inches is recommended.

Mulching is just one of Autumn’s gardening chores. We know this is also a time to pick up plant debris, such as leaves that have fallen after the first frost. Cleaning up fallen material prevents diseases or pests from overwintering in that deadfall and emerging in the spring. It also removes weed seeds.

You may need to prune plants that don’t flower in the spring, and it’s also a good time to improve your soil, clean your equipment, sharpen it, and then oil it.

One additional thought, particularly when mulching around perennial flowers: don’t forget



Additional Resources:

- Meghan Garrity and Megan Tierney, Mulching: Purpose, Benefits, and Essential Information: <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/SPES/spes-661/spes-661.html>
- Tyler Osborn. Tidying up your Winter Garden <https://clay.ces.ncsu.edu/news/tidying-up-your-garden-in-winter/>
- Tidying up your garden in winter: <https://clay.ces.ncsu.edu>

SOIL TESTS – HOW TO TAKE ONE WHAT THOSE NUMBERS MEAN, WHAT TO DO NEXT

BY LEILANI HALL, EMG

While you are planning next spring’s garden, now is the time to make sure that the soil can sufficiently nourish and support what you put into it.

Different plants require differing nutrients which they draw from the soil. You might remember from your high school biology class the NPK balance. That is, Nitrogen (N) supports vegetative growth and green color, phosphorus (P) has important roles in energy transfer, root development, flowering and reproduction, and potassium (K) contributes to water regulation, stress tolerance, and plant vigor. The need for these three macronutrients differs by plant, beginning with simple differences as among vegetables, flowers, and shrubs, but they even vary within each category.

Autumn is a good time to do the most important and basic chore of gardening – take a soil test. The nutrient composition of soil can change over several years, depending on what plants were grown in it, any kind of amendments, and simple acts of nature such as leaf fall and rainwater. Taking the soil sample now provides time to make recommended amendments, and the changes you make to adjust the composition will have an opportunity to normalize through with autumn rain and winter snow melt. Samples should be taken every three to five years, when establishing a new garden or landscape, or a

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As Rick Hernandez, Virginia's extension agent for Fluvanna County in Agriculture and Natural Resources says, "For anyone who works the land, soil testing is a small step with large impact. It guides smarter inputs, supports healthier soils, and helps ensure that the ground we rely on stays productive and sustainable for the next generation."

Simple process, quick results

Taking a soil test is simple. The soil testing kits are available from the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) office in Fork Union and at the Fluvanna County Public Library. They include step-by-step instructions, including what you need, where to test, how to take a sample, how to submit the sample, and what the test analysis tells you. To determine the number of soil samples you need, just divide your yard or garden into separate areas that will be managed the same way, such as lawn, vegetable bed, and flower bed.

Take a separate sample from each area because they can need different treatments. In established lawns, dig down 2 to 4 inches below the thatch, in vegetable or flower gardens, go 6 or 8 inches down, and with trees or shrubs, its 6 inches below all mulch. Collect at least 10 small subsamples in a random pattern of the area, mix them thoroughly in a clean plastic bucket, then fill the mixed sample in the test box. Once your samples are collected, fill out the soil test form, label the samples clearly, and send them with \$10 for each sample through the extension office or mail directly to the Virginia Tech Soil Testing Lab at the address on the kit.

Results are usually returned within a few weeks, though turnaround can vary with seasonal volume, so that you can treat or plant with a clear plan instead of making costly trial and error mistakes. Although Virginia Tech does not test routinely for nitrogen, the soil test reports on the pH level of the soil, the available levels of important nutrients such as phosphorus, potassium, calcium, and magnesium that your plants may need, the soil's ability to hold and trade those positively charged plant nutrients, and the report even includes helpful specific lime and fertilizer recommendations. The VCE provides additional support on-line or in-person with a detailed explanation on how best to implement the recommendations and information on all the elements tested and reported.

Remember, you are not alone. There is a ton of information at the VCE website, go to ext.vt.edu and search "soil test" or follow the link Soil Sampling for Residential Areas | VCE Publications | Virginia Tech." To ask questions and for more information, contact the VCE office or your friendly neighborhood Fluvanna Master Gardener. If you find all this useful and want to know more, consider joining the Master Gardeners program at fluvannamg.org.

BECOME A MASTER GARDENER, SIGN UP NOW

BY LEILANI SANDERS HALL, EMG

Does the human need for purpose ever end? Apparently not.

I retired a couple of years ago from a meaningful job. My children are grown, have children of their own, and all live far away. I felt content, but I still sensed that there was room in my life for something more.

Then I picked up the *Fluvanna Review* and read an article about the Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program. Aha — this was exactly what I had been looking for. It offered something meaningful to do with my newly found time. It also offered the possibility of learning more about the mysterious reasons so many of my plants seem determined not to thrive.

My journey began with the Fluvanna Master Gardener's training program. I won't say it was easy, but I also wouldn't say it was too difficult. It was carefully designed from the start to meet the varying needs of people who want to learn not only about gardening but about how they can become more involved in their community. Then I received the program text, *The Gardener's Handbook*, the Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener training manual. To be frank, I think I was a bit shocked. It just seemed like too much information to absorb.

I was matched with a Master Gardener mentor, Donna McCarthy, who provided me with insight into the full program, advice on how to focus on the more critical topics, and how to explore my own areas of individual interest. She guided me through the 50 hours of research-based horticultural training and then the following required 50 hours of supervised volunteer service as a Master Gardener intern.

As the classes progressed, one pleasant surprise was how often my focus and interests

evolved as I learned more. I began with an interest in landscape design, but I now find myself equally engaged by water quality and conservation, native plants, and soil augmentation. That kind of broadening interest seems to be common among my fellow 2026 graduating Master Gardeners. This happened organically, because the coursework and training are logically stacked, closely integrated, and surprisingly relevant to everyday life.

Built-in flexibility

The program is very well organized in both content and delivery. The head of training, Nancy Rossnagel, and co-lead Vicki Buffmire, offered weekday evening Zoom classes, weekend in-person workshops, and occasional informational sessions. All topics were presented by experts in their fields. If I missed a class or workshop, it was recorded so I could make it up by viewing it online at a more convenient time. That level of planning and flexibility made the program accessible to a wide range of participants, including those still working full time.

This flexibility held true for the ensuing intern volunteer hours which are required by the program. Fluvanna Master Gardeners have a wide variety of activities to choose from that met our interests and time availability. With all the projects and activities they have, there will be plenty of opportunities to meet the required volunteer hours and continuing education to keep my status active in the coming years.

When I set out on the program, I had originally hoped simply to improve my plant survival rate from 30% to 50%, but I found something much more valuable: purpose. I also found a community of caring, thoughtful, and truly special individuals whom I am proud to call friends. They come from many walks of life, united by a shared desire to care for our environment and help neighbors live better, healthier lives, now and for years to come.

If you've thought about becoming part of the Master Gardener community, you can learn more at training course information sessions held at the Fluvanna Public Library: Saturday, October 24, 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. and Thursday, October 29, from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. Once you've signed up, there will be a training course orientation on Saturday, January 9, from 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon. And the classes begin shortly after that. The application with more information details is on the Fluvanna Master Gardener website, www.fluvannamg.org.

Join us. You'll find out about the mysteries your plants have been concealing from you, make new friends, and find new purpose in serving your community in many ways.



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