

Turnip News

Master Gardener –
Prince William County



December 2012

Inside of this Issue

Page Squirrels
2/3

Page Camellias
4

Page Elderberry
5/7

Page MG News
8

MG President's Words

Master Gardeners –

We had a great time at the fall flower arranging class. Lots of fun and laughs.

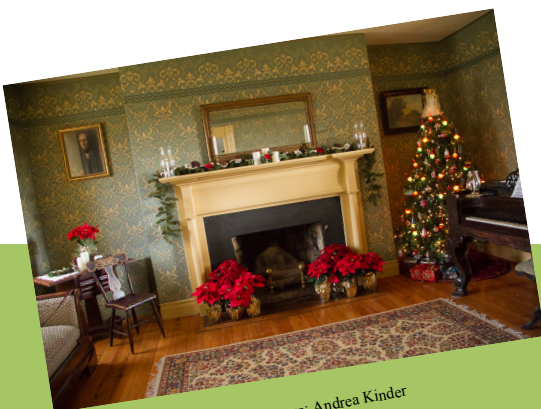
This will give me something new to try during the Holidays.

I hope you all had a fabulous Thanksgiving and are getting into the holiday spirit.

As this is my last article as the MGPW president; I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

I have enjoyed my time on the MG board and thank you for the opportunity to work with you as we serve our community.

Sincerely
Desiree



Picture: Andrea Kinder

Enjoy your Holidays!

Squirrel



Picture: Northrup Photography

We have a large oak with very small acorns and of late I see a bunch of busily active squirrels on the deck as I'm fixing dinner, cheeks full as they sit on the railing for a moment, perhaps wondering where to bury some of the abundant acorns for a good winter's supply of nourishment. If they'd limit their activities to acorns I wouldn't mind it so much but they have a fondness for bulbs, seeds and plants and rip the bark off of trees. It seems that when I've disturbed the ground by putting in tulips and lilies for next spring they can smell that and assume that dinner has been buried there especially for them. I planted the seeds from some *festuca glauca* ornamental grass which had made seed last year and, when I went to check on the pot buried in my raised garden, somebody – and I'm inclined to think it was a squirrel – had dug into the pot, scattering potting mix and seed all over, dug the pot out of the ground and, to add insult to injury, removed the plant label and moved the pot some distance.

Squirrels make themselves entirely unwelcome in their attempts to find food and various methods are tried to discourage or dispose of them. They used to drive my Dad to distraction because he lived in a large wood frame house in suburban Connecticut which was notable for providing ingress to cold winds in the winter and the occasional squirrel as well. He was terrified that one might gnaw on a wire in the attic, electrocute himself and as collateral damage set the house on fire. My father's concern grew to the point that one early morning when my husband and I and our small daughter were visiting for the weekend I rose and started down from the third floor and heard a shot. Reaching the second floor with remarkable speed I saw my father at his bedroom window, revolver in hand and his elbow braced on the radiator cover as he prepared to shoot again. Mom looked slightly bored as if she'd seen all this before and, when I asked, she said that he'd seen two squirrels in one of the eaves trying to get into the house and had decided he couldn't risk letting them enter.

Now, I'm not in favor of such draconian methods but squirrels can be quite a problem and are not easy to discourage in their search for a good dinner - Our bird feeder will also attest to that.

There doesn't seem to be any way to avoid run-ins with squirrels (order *Rodentia*, family *Sciuridae*) since they live pretty much world wide except for very dry deserts and polar regions. The family members can range in size from the African pygmy squirrel, 3.9” and .35 oz, to the Alpine marmot, 29” and as much as 18 lbs. The family includes, besides tree and ground squirrels, chipmunks, marmots, woodchucks, flying squirrels and prairie dogs. Their diet is generally composed of seeds, bulbs and nuts but insects and small vertebrates are also eaten by some.

Our adaptable, omnivorous, diurnal grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) are native to the eastern United States. Their life span should be approximately six years but is generally less than one year due, in urban areas, to cars and, in some rural areas, to starvation during the winter. They breed twice, generally in February and March and again from July to September. At six to ten months of age they are weaned and their mother has nothing further to do with them. They are sexually mature after a year.

I think squirrels are cute and admire their resourcefulness but I'd like to deter the squirrels from damaging my gardens without actually doing them harm and if you share my world view, I have found some suggestions which may help you as well.

1If you've got trees that are being stripped of their bark by squirrels, it is suggested you wrap the trees around the base with 24" wide aluminum flashing and secure it to the tree with nails as needed. The nails are said not to do harm since, with CODIT (Compartmentalization of Decay In Trees), when the nails are removed the tree will cover over the small hole left by the nail. My husband mentions, though, that forgotten nails will be found later by chainsaws when the wood is cut.

If squirrels are in your garden eating your bulbs and cherished plants there are three tricks you may want to try:

1Lay down tightly woven wire mesh (not chicken wire), over the plants you wish to protect and weight it down with rocks or bricks. The mesh can be removed after a while when the plants seem to have taken. As mentioned before, they are most attracted when the plants or bulbs are newly settled into the ground. After they've been there a while squirrels are not as interested.

2Squirrels need water to drink and it was suggested that you keep a good supply, perhaps in bird baths and the like. The thought is that squirrels go after plants when they need moisture.

3It is suggested that you set up a decoy for the squirrels. Grow a crop they'll like and they'll stay away from what you don't want them to eat. I have known squirrels to be hungry enough that this might only be a temporary solution to the problem but it would certainly make the squirrels happy. The downside of these last two suggestions is that squirrels, while in the area, look for more variety in their diet and head for your garden.

If bird feeders are being raided and you cannot keep them in such a way that squirrels can't reach them – during that dreadful snowstorm two years ago I saw a hungry squirrel jumping some 5' to try to reach our bird feeder – there are a couple of tricks which should help:

1There are the bird feeders developed specifically to deny squirrels a way in. They usually have a cone over the top so that the squirrel slides down the cone and can't get to the birdseed; this also provides a good laugh to those watching. Some are made with a bar that closes off the supply of birdseed when the weight of the squirrel hits it.

2For bird feeders on a pole, WD-40 or Vaseline will make the pole slippery enough that squirrels can't climb up to the bird feeder.

One source mentioned other deterrents, which I'd heard of, and said they were not very effective. They include: 1) chicken wire - The squirrels are said to be able to move it or gnaw through it; 2) moth balls – they can harm children or pets and, since they contain naphthalene and other toxic chemicals they are a contaminant of soil and water; 3) plastic mesh – squirrels can chew through this; 4) motion detector sprinklers – can provide a big surprise for any human in the area; 5) chilli, cayenne or black pepper – squirrels can get used to this; 6) Fake snakes, marigolds, hair, predator urine, cats, pin wheels, coffee grounds, soap are all temporary measures at best.

Squirrels have the advantage of being cute and have on many occasions been made into pets but as a committed gardener I have to agree with Sarah Jessica Parker who said: "You can't be friends with a squirrel! A squirrel is just a rat with a cuter outfit."

Camellias

As I write it's the end of November and if you're viewing a beautiful shrub with large pink, red, or white blossoms in bloom right now it is undoubtedly a Camellia sasanqua.

There are two main types of camellias; the Camellia japonica, which blooms in late winter or early spring with larger leaves and flowers, and the Camellia Sasanqua, with smaller dark leaves, which blooms in early and late fall. The Sasanquas are hardier, more drought-tolerant and disease-resistant than japonicas. Best of all they bloom beautifully when nothing else is lighting up the landscape.

Virginia Tech provides information on the Japonica—growth and care are similar for both varieties. Tech suggests consulting local nurseries and garden centers for best varieties in our locality.

I consulted David Yost at Merrifield Garden Center who highly recommends the Winters series of Camellias, bred at the National Arboretum. He commented that the Sasanquas have the additional feature of being self-cleaning. The nine varieties of the Winters Series are all successful here. His one warning—deer often enjoy them too!

If right now you're envying your neighbors blooms, head to your local nursery. The American Camellia Society states camellias are generally best planted in late fall through early spring for easiest care, as adequate moisture is a necessity until roots are established. However, they may be set out at any time with constant attention to required moisture. Virginia Tech recommends planting in organic, moist, well-drained, acid soil located in partial shade, with some protection from winter winds to prevent leaf scorch. Don't forget to mulch. Avoid areas where their roots will compete with shallow rooted trees.

Camellias provide the bonus of their attractive year round evergreen presence. Thus they can be used as foundation plantings, borders, hedges, and specimen plants, usually growing from six to fifteen feet tall. Spacing between plants should be five feet or more, unless used as hedging, when three feet is sufficient. Want to grow a camellia from seed? I am told this is a slow process but I'm giving it a try. I found a seedpod on my Winters Dream bush. In the picture you can view the difference in size of a bud and a seedpod. As instructed I left the pod on the bush until it turned brown, and was ready to burst, the time to harvest. Now two of the seeds repose in a pot of bonsai planting soil, as recommended. If you want to try this it might be helpful to consult http://www.ehow.com/how_7355031_grow-camellias-seed.html for more details.

If you develop an affinity for Camellias you will enjoy reading Growing Camellias in Cold Climates by William L. Ackerman, the best-known breeder of cold hardy camellias. Information can also be found at <http://camellia-ics/ackerm1.htm>. As for camellia pests, the best clearly illustrated information I've found is on the web site of the Gainesville Camellia Society.

If bright flowers in the brown days of fall appeal to you, and the ground is not yet frozen, you can still dash off to the local nursery and fetch one. This attractive evergreen will give you instant gratification while you wait for the fall show.



Article: Marion Ashley

Photo: Rachel Crowe

Elderberry: *Sambucus nigra*,

also known as the European Elder

Winter is approaching. Holidays are near. Colds and flu can sneak in to our households bringing runny noses and coughs. A small tree or shrub, the elderberry has been relieving these complaints for centuries. Sambucol, Sambucus, two popular names for commercial products fly off the shelves of health or natural supplement departments at this time of year. I have heard many stories of folks getting through a winter with no or few respiratory ailments hitting their households when combining elderberry with good winter health practices. If a cold should hit, elderberry syrup supplements are often the herb of choice. Research studies are being conducted by notable University's Complementary and Alternative Medical Departments including the NIH. The German Commission E recommends elderberry and elder flower preparations for colds and flu even bronchitis.

Elder has a rich history. One of its name origins is Aeld, which meant fire. The pith in young branches is soft and easily pushes out. A hollow tube remains which was used to stoke the kitchen fires, hence the common name of pipe tree. In ancient times pipes were made of elder wood and fashioned into instruments and of course pea shooters.

Elder, referenced by Shakespeare and Pliny, holds a place of connection whether superstition, hedgerows, or poetry capturing us with its many uses and meanings.

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0b/Ripe_Elderberries_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1493180.jpg/240px-Ripe_Elderberries_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1493180.jpg



Where Found: common to Europe and Northern Africa; now found all over the United States; in fact it was thought this was the tree Judas chose to hang from. A fungus occurs on the elder, *Hirroneola auricular* Judaea, so named from the above historical story or myth.

Elder is considered a small tree about 10-12' high or a shrub. It is commonly found along wood edges, along wood stands in fields, along banks and fences. This plant is also nitrogen loving and in the Honeysuckle family. It flowers from May- June. Fruit ripens in August. Virginia Tech has a great ID page and plant facts: <http://dendro.cnre.vt.edu/dendrology/syllabus/factsheet.cfm?ID=85>

Parts Used: wood, leaves, flowers, berries; very popular insect and songbird attractor;

Wood: wood from older trees cuts and polishes easily. Traditionally this wood though hard was used for smaller wooden implements like pegs, skewers for butchers, or needles for weaving. The elder is common in parts of Europe as a hedgerow and for fencing. In Scotland the bark of older elders creates and was used as a black dye.

Leaves: Leaves are typically collected in June and July, in the morning after the dew has evaporated. Leaves can be cut and infused with oil, such as olive oil, to make salves, ointments for bruises and sprains. When the leaves are crushed the odor is not pleasant and is thought to deter insects. When made into a tea the cooled liquid was used to keep aphids off other plants and even to ward off blight. If sprinkled on a hat this tea could prevent flies from swarming around the face. When leaves are mixed with alum a blue purple dye is created. These are external uses. I could not find consistent use of tea from leaves for everyday use. Therefore I would not recommend this practice.

Berries and Flowers are the medicinal parts and used extensively in jams, pies, wine, cordials, juice and in medicinal supplements.



Elder Flowers: are collected just before the peak bloom time. They are small, white, and plentiful forming large flattened corymbs with a strong pleasant scent. Euell Gibbons, *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*, gathers the flowers both for drink and for food. Remember where you pick the flowers you will not find berries later in the season. So it is best to randomly pick the flowers over many limbs in order to reap the reward of berry picking later on. Elder flowers were also an ingredient in an ointment used to dress wounds, burns, scalds, chapped hands. In the early wars elder flower ointment treated wounded horses. Elder flower water was a household remedy to keep skin fair and free of blemishes.

Elder Berries: One of the most common uses of elderberries and probably most known is elderberry wine and cordials. These concoctions and the juice of elderberry is one of the best known preventions against the flu and chills.

Nutrition Facts: "According to the USDA National Nutrient Database, a cup of elderberries yields .96 g of protein, .72 g of fat, 26.68 g of carbohydrates and 10.2 g of total dietary fiber, all at a modest 106 calories. Elderberries are cholesterol-free, virtually fat-free and low in sodium."

(<http://www.livestrong.com/article/373102-elderberry-juice-nutrition-information/#ixzz2Bm0pFE14>)

Vinegars are easy to make, have a good shelf life and are an easy way to preserve nutrients from many herbs, culinary included. Organic apple cider vinegar is always my first choice though the chefs among probably have a favorite wine or rice vinegar that will work too.

Recipe: Elder Berry Vinegar

Pick 2 lb of elderberries and dry them

Place in a quart jar and pour vinegar over berries.

Let sit, shake every few days. Strain after 2 weeks. This condiment can be added to salad dressings, to flavor sauces, as a marinade etc.

Please note: I have included two pictures of a lookalike, Pokeweed, *Phytolacca americana*, very common to our area. Though the flowers are different, the purple berry and red stems can be easily confused with elderberry. The berries of pokeweed are NOT edible and can cause a very bad stomach ache and should not be eaten by children. The young shoots in early spring, 6" tall or less can be eaten as a pot herb. Foraged greens like pokeweed need to be boiled two or three times to make the green palatable. Pokeweed is typically shorter than elderberry, easily bent and can be invasive. I always recommend folks to check 3-5 field guides when identifying a plant and to check with someone who can verify the plant before consuming.



http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/f4/Phytolacca_americana_005.JPG/360px-Phytolacca_americana_005.JPG

Elderberry has had an esteemed place in our kitchens and our medicine cabinets. Elderberry jam is easy to obtain in our area. I usually purchase some from farm markets to have on hand throughout the winter months. Elderberry syrup can be purchased at pharmacies and health food stores. Elderberry lozenges help soothe a sore throat. I am sure some of you have a favorite recipe using elderberries.

Submitted by Judith Dreyer, MS, BSN, RN, FCMG

MGPW Events

We had the flower arranging class with Doug Burroughs from the Flower Gallery in November. He is a very entertaining speaker as well as a good teacher. Our cornucopias were beautiful. He also demonstrated a Christmas arrangement as well as an everyday one. We raffled them off and Kathy Burch was lucky enough to win the Christmas centerpiece. We all appreciated that he took the time to come show us how easily it is to make our own beautiful arrangements.

Next MGPW Event: January 23rd 2012 at the Old Courthouse, Corner of Grant and Lee Avenues in Manassas.

Paige will be doing a Propagation Class starting at 630pm. This is also a makeup session for the Class of 2013. If you are planning on attending please rsvp to the Hort Helpdesk at 703-792-7747 by the 18th so we know how many people will be attending the class.

Basics of Gardening

Basics of Gardening will be a one day class again this year. The date is Saturday, February 23rd 2013. It will be held at the Manassas Park Community Center, 99 Adams St, Manassas Park VA 20111. The flyer will be ready soon. The speakers this year are Paul Gibson, Jeff Schneider, Rachel Habig, and Leslie Paulson. Watch for more information soon. If you want to help out this year please email Leslie Paulson at ljp6651@comcast.net.

Teaching Garden News

We will try to have one last work day in December. Weather permitting it will be Tuesday, December 11th at 9am. We need to spread leaf mulch on the Woodland Garden and weed the Meadow as well as drain our hoses for the winter.

The Memorial Garden will be formally dedicated on Saturday, March 23rd at 11 am. We will be inviting the family members of the Master Gardeners that have bricks engraved in our Memorial. It would be nice to have a group of us to show support to the families that day. The names of those who shall not be forgotten are Donna Dickenson, Mary Hayes, and Cathy Barosky. Please mark this down on your calendars.

Shirt Orders and Cobra Tools

The gray shirt and denim shirts have been ordered. There isn't a date for delivery yet. The plan is to bring them to Recert on January 7th. This will be held at the Edward Kelly Leadership Center, 14715 Bristow Rd, Manassas, Virginia from 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm. If this is a problem get in touch with Leslie Paulson. We will also be selling Cobra Tools that evening for \$20.

Watch for details about our Annual Social in the next newsletter

The PHS Philadelphia Flower Show - March 2-10, 2013



In 2013, the PHS Philadelphia Flower Show prepares for a British Invasion as the culture and horticulture of the United Kingdom takes center stage. Receive the royal treatment as you explore great gardens and learn from the world's most celebrated growers and designers.

New in 2013, the Flower Show will be open for an extra day! Now you have more time to shop from more than 140 vendors, sample wine and spirits from around the world, and see floral and garden experts in their glory.

Take a look at what you have waiting for you at the 2013 show.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYDhldYCnRE&feature=player_embedded

The price will be the same as last year, \$75. Mark your calendars on Wednesday, March 6, 2013.

Flora of Virginia Project

You can now pre-order the *Flora of Virginia*. The publication date is targeted for December 2012. It describes 3,200 taxa in 200 families and features 1,400 captioned, scaled, and botanically accurate illustrations. Introductory material will include essays on the natural history and vegetation of Virginia and a historical account of botanical exploration in the state, as well as a key to the vascular plant families represented in the Flora. A glossary, bibliography, and comprehensive index will also be provided.

Pre-orders can be made through email, phone, fax, or mail. For more information, please contact the Press Assistant. 817-332-4441 Ext. 232 Fax: 817-332-4112. Email: orders@brit.org or <http://www.britpress.org>

Mail order: *Flora of Virginia* Send Payment to BRIT Press 1700 University Dr Fort Worth, TX 76107-3400 USA

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Happy Holidays!

Picture: Andrea Kinder

Further information on 'Squirrel' article:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squirrel>

Squirrel

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

http://www.mnh.si.edu/mna/image_info.cfm?species_id=298

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History

North American Mammals

http://conservation-issues.co.uk/Articles%20Pages/Grey_Squirrel_Article_07-07.htm

Conservation Issues UK

<http://www.weekendgardener.net/organic-pesticide/keep-squirrels-out-100910.htm>

Weekend Gardener Monthly Web Magazine, October 2012

KEEP SQUIRRELS OUT OF YOUR GARDEN You're cute,
but get out of my planter beds!

<http://voices.yahoo.com/organic-ways-keep-squirrels-pests-out-your-3009899.html>

Yahoo Voices Organic Ways to Keep Squirrels and Pests Out of Your Garden

Viktoria Carrella, Yahoo! Contributor Network

<http://npic.orst.edu/ingred/ptype/mothball/regulation.html>

National Pesticide Information Center

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/squirrel.html>

Brainy Quote

<http://www.northrup.org/photos/grey-squirrel/>

Northrup Photography

Squirrel in Grass Eating Acorn