

THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

SEPTEMBER 2021



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Welcome, everyone, to the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners brand-new community newsletter.

Each month we will be bringing you relevant seasonal horticultural information for Rockbridge County. If you enjoy this newsletter, please pass it on. Subscription information is on the last page of this newsletter.

Thinking about Becoming a Master Gardener?

Join us Thursday night, September 30 at 7:00 P.M. for a Zoom presentation about all things Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners. We are an organization working with Virginia Cooperative Extension as volunteers to assist, advise, and educate the Rockbridge community in many aspects of gardening. At the Zoom meeting, you will learn about the requirements of the training program. If interested, visit our web page (<https://www.ramga.org/>) for the Zoom link.

UPCOMING PLANT SALES

Saturday, September 4, 9am – noon. Native Plant Sale. Wintergreen Nature Foundation, 725 Beech Grove Rd., Roseland, Va. <https://www.twnf.org/greenhouse/>

Saturday, October 9, 9am – 3pm. 2021 Fall Plant Sale at the Center for Historic Plants, Tufton Farm. For more information, <https://www.monticello.org/house-gardens/center-for-historic-plants/visit-us/>

Friday and Saturday, September 17, 18, 9am – 5pm. Fall PlantFest at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, VA. Looking for something special? This is the place!
<https://www.lewisginter.org/event/fall-plant-sale/>

FALL GARDEN TIPS

By Donna Campagna

September is the beginning of the fall season as the weather begins to cool and your garden starts to produce less growth. It is also a great month to begin a new compost pile and a good time to complete all your notes about your summer garden. What new plant surprised you? What would you plant more of next year? Any do-overs? What the weather was like and what was its impact on your garden? What diseases and/or pests did you encounter and what impact they had on your garden? What treatments did you use? List items needed for next year's garden.

September is prep month for winter and next season.

For your vegetable garden:

- Harvest your vegetables to make room for fall plantings. You can plant broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, kale, radishes, spinach, beets, carrots, mustard greens, turnips, some onions. (A row cover may be needed for some vegetables to protect from pests and later from possible frost.)
- Put spent leaves and plants in the compost pile.
- Gather herbs for drying and collect seeds from your plants for next year.
- Consider planting a cover crop.
- Clean and organize garden trellises, hoops, netting and cages you are not using.
- Order garlic to plant next month. I've always heard "Plant on Halloween and harvest on 4th of July."
- Wash used pots for next year's use.
- If you can get hold of strawberry plants, put them in your garden for next year.

For your flower garden:

- De-head and de-leaf dead debris. Although I like to leave seed heads for birds to use as a food source during the winter, so don't tidy up too much.
- Dig up any bulbs that won't make it through the winter. Store bulbs in newspaper or paper bag in a cool, dry place.
- Plant spring bulbs
- Divide perennial plants as needed. Re-plant or give away the extras.
- Plant fall flowers like mums, asters, ornamental peppers, flowering kale, and sedums.
- Clean out areas around flowers and remove any diseased debris
- Fertilize with compost, decayed leaf mold, or additional peat moss if soil is acidic.



Doing the above will leave time for you to care for your fall crops as they mature. When they are finished for the season, you can prepare your garden for winter. As you can see there is still lots to do but it will be worth all the effort come spring. There is great satisfaction in preparing your gardens for the winter knowing everything is as it should be and looking forward to the next growing season in the spring.

VEGETABLES OF THE MONTH – SPINACH AND GARLIC

SPINACH

Don't give up on your vegetable gardens yet. In Rockbridge County, we should be able to plant spinach for all of September and even into the winter. Spinach is considered a cool season vegetable and likes temperatures in the '60s. Hot summer days with long hours and high temperatures can cause spinach to bolt. Spinach likes full sun but can take some shade. There are several varieties of spinach: smooth-leaf, curly leaf, arrowhead and savory. Some fall varieties of spinach include 'Gazelle', 'Carmel', 'Auroch', and 'Winter Bloomsdale'. This vegetable is especially good for you, containing iron, potassium, magnesium, vitamins A, B⁶, B₉, C, E and lutein.



Plant seeds about 2' apart as crowding can cause a low germination rate. It often helps to presoak seeds before planting. Seeds will germinate in 5-10 days. Thin young plants to every 6". Be careful when weeding as spinach is very shallowly rooted. Make sure the plants have enough water. Mulch plants to retain moisture. Spinach should be ready 40-70 days from seed and can be harvested when the plant has 6-8 leaves.

GARLIC

Fall is the proper time to plant garlic, at least three weeks before the ground freezes so the roots have a chance to develop. Garlic, as with most plants in the allium family (onions, shallots, leeks and chives), requires at least two years between successive plantings to allow the soil to recover. Loamy soil and full sun are best.

It is not a good idea to grow garlic from bulbs you have bought at the grocery store. Most of those have been treated with chemicals to make them more shelf stable. Look for garlic at one of our local farmers markets or find a reputable dealer online (I usually use Southern Exposure Seeds, www.southernexposure.com located outside of Charlottesville). Also, I grow garlic every year and usually save some of the plumpest bulbs from my July harvest for planting.

Break the bulb apart into cloves and weed out the tiniest ones. Large cloves will equal large bulbs. Plant them root side down with 4-8" between plants, planting at least two inches below the surface. I find it easiest to dig a trench. Mulch with shredded leaves or straw.

Round about June, garlic will send up a curly firm scape (flower stalk) that looks a bit like a swan's neck. Cut these off. They are edible and taste a bit like a very spicy scallion. Cutting off the scapes allows more energy to go into the bulb rather than into a flower. In midsummer, usually around the 4th of July, my garlic is ready to pull when the bottom leaves are yellow and 3-5 lower leaves turn brown. I use a spade fork to unearth the bulbs. Brush off the soil. Garlic bulbs need to cure for about two weeks in a warm shady place with good air circulation. Hang in bundles or spread in a single layer on screens or drying racks. Don't store garlic in the refrigerator as it will likely sprout.

There are two types of garlic: hardneck and softneck. Softneck tends to last a little longer (9-12 months) and can be braided for storage. It likes a warmer climate. Hardneck is the one that develops a scape and is often a bit more flavorful than softnecks. They peel easier and have larger cloves. Their shelf life is about 4 – 6 months



Try growing some garlic this year. It is about the most carefree vegetable you will grow! Just stick in the ground this fall and ignore it until July when it is ready to pull.

FROM THE HELP DESK

The Latest Winged Invader

By Karen Lyons

Spotted Lantern Fly (*Lycoma delicatula*) is the latest in a series of non-native insects to become a troublesome pest in Virginia. This planthopper was first discovered in Pennsylvania in 2014, believed to originate in China and likely arrived in shipping materials. It was first detected in Virginia in January 2018 and has already spread to at least 7 counties. Although the preferred host plant is another non-native invasive, the Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), several agricultural crops such as grapes, hops and fruit trees are subject to potential damage.

Spotted Lanternfly (SLF) feeds on the sap of young stems and leaves. The insect excretes sugar-rich fluid known as honeydew covering plant parts as well as the ground underneath. This favors the growth of sooty mold and attracts other insects such as yellow jackets, hornets, and flies. Both the direct damage by feeding and the sooty mold decrease photosynthesis and weakens the host plant. Fermenting of the honeydew produces an unpleasant vinegar odor, and the ooze and mold an unsightly mess.

SLF overwinters in egg masses. In Virginia, these hatch in early May producing nymphs that undergo several instars or stages before developing into adults by late July. Egg laying begins in September and extends through November. Stages frequently overlap.

It is important to recognize SLF in its various stages. The egg masses are 1-1.5 inches long by ½-¾ inches wide, initially appearing shiny gray then turning a dull brownish gray. They are usually found on tree trunks, rocks, and smooth surfaces.

Young nymphs are wingless, black with white spots, measuring up to ¾ inch. More mature nymphs maintain their spotted appearance but have additional red patches and measure up to 7/8 inch.

Adult SLF have black head and legs and a yellow abdomen with black bands. Forewings are tan with black spots and tips have very fine black rectangular blocks. The hind wings are characteristically red with black spots and the tips are black with a white stripe. The insect is usually spotted resting with its forewings folded over the body like a tent.

What you can do:

- Examine your property and plants periodically for the presence of egg masses, nymphs, and adults.
- If you suspect SLF, report it here: https://vce.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0fdsQXRg8TO8uzk
Or contact your local extension agent: Tom Stanley, (540) 463-4734
- If you identify SLF egg masses scrape them off into a zip lock bag filled with hand sanitizer, secure and dispose of the bag. Dormant oil can also be applied in late winter through early spring, but before bud break.
- Control for nymphs and adult SLF includes applying sticky band traps to trunks, using approved contact insecticides/organic sprays/biological controls, or applying a systemic insecticide via soil drench. For detailed recommendations see publication: <https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=2076&contentname=Best%20Management%20Practices%20for%20Spotted%20Lanternfly%20in%20Yards%20and%20Landscapes>
- Finally, eliminate Tree of Heaven (TOH) from your landscape since this is believed to be a preferred host for SLF. For information regarding recognition of TOH and its elimination see: [https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=2408&contentname=Invasive%20Plant%20Species:%20Ailanthus%20\(Ailanthus%20altissima\)](https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=2408&contentname=Invasive%20Plant%20Species:%20Ailanthus%20(Ailanthus%20altissima))



Clockwise from top left: Adult showing hind wings; adult with folded wings; early black and white nymphs; full grown nymphs showing red; and egg masses.

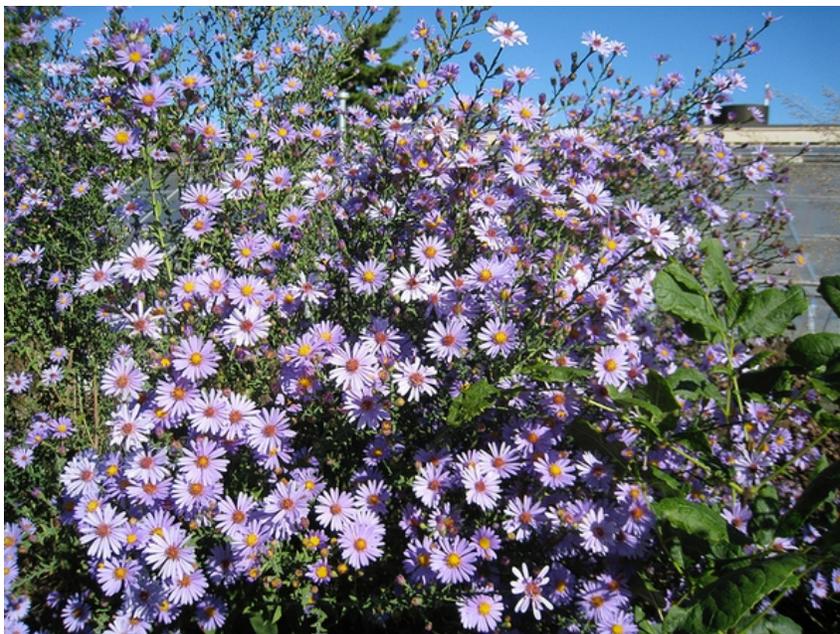
ASTERS: The Perennial Stars of the Fall Garden

By Faith Vosburgh

Asters are definitely the stars in the fall garden. I cannot imagine a late garden without them. Asters come in all shapes and sizes, from a few inches tall to a height of 5' or more. There are an estimated 250-300 different species of asters worldwide. This prolific plant (in this case, *Aster novi-belgii* and *Aster novi-angliae**) seems to pop up all over my garden, but often looks stringy by fall with lots of dead foliage running along the bottom of the plant, even though, as per the advice of Tracy Sabato-Aust, author of *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden: Planting and Pruning Techniques*, (a book I highly recommend to any perennial grower), I cut the plants back drastically in early June. What to do?

Mt Cuba Center (www.mtcubacenter.org) in Hockessin, Delaware is a non-profit botanical garden that specializes in native plants of the Piedmont. If you are ever in the Philadelphia area, be sure to visit. They are also a well-known research center on native plants and do yearly trials on various families of plants. Asters were trialed in 2006. 56 different aster species were planted and studied. You can check out the aster trial report here: https://issuu.com/mtcuba/docs/mt_cuba_report-asters_for_mid-atlantic?fr=sYig2YTIONjAxNDg

My plan is to slowly replace all my asters with some of the higher ranked ones from the trial. Last year I put in Smooth Aster 'Bluebird' (*Aster laevis*) and it is doing beautifully with very little dead at its bottom. This was one of Mt. Cuba's highest-ranking asters. It has the usual violet-blue flowers with leaves that are lance-shaped. In its second season, it is 3' tall and almost as wide. I also put in Aromatic aster 'October Skies' (*Symphotrichum oblongifolium*), another winner. This too, has very little dieback at the bottom of the stem. 'October Skies' has the same purple color but is shorter (2') and shrubbier. I already grow two other nice asters, also with high ratings: Smooth aster 'Lady in Black' (*Laevis lateriflorus*), close to 4' with dark foliage and white flowers, and the smaller New England Aster 'Purple Dome' (*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*) an old standby that grows to about 18" in my garden, hiding the unsightly foliage at its base.



I'll keep some of my older asters for now as I gradually replace them with better varieties. I will, however, be planting some shorter fall flowers such as the newish 'Little Goldstar' Black-eyed Susan, in front of them to hide their unsightly legs.

Source: Frett, Janet and Victor Piatt, "Asters for the Mid-Atlantic Region: Mt. Cuba Center Research Report 2006", Hokessin, DE, Mt Cuba Center.

Photo: North Carolina Extension Toolbox <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/symphotrichum-laeve/>

*To make things even more confusing, botanists have reclassified asters. *Aster novae-angliae* (New England Aster) and *Aster novae-belgii* (New York Aster) are now *Symphotrichum novae-angliae* and *Symphotrichum novae-belgii* but to make things simpler I am using the old names. Nomenclature keeps botanists in business.

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<https://www.ramga.org/what-s-happening>

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