

# Gardening on the Shore

Fall, 2021

## Message from the President

Who doesn't love Autumn! The weather is delightful, and I think of this season as harvest time - when you reap what you sow. Nature is showing us its beautiful colors after working so hard the past summer. 'Tis the season when fall crops are ripe and ready to be gathered, birds are feasting on seed pods and the last of the flowering plants provide food for bees and butterflies before they embrace winter.

Fall is also the time to prepare our gardens for the winter months. Remove dead branches but remember that plants that have died back need not be removed until spring. Many of our native insects would be delighted to find protection from the winter elements in the stems of those plants. Last year, I found that lady bugs had overwintered in the ornamental grasses - so glad I waited to cut them back!

Congratulations to our two newest members to achieve Master Gardener status - Nancy Arnold and Margaret Andrews. They went the extra mile to meet their 50 volunteer hours during this challenging period.

I also extend a special thank you to all that, despite the hurdles of the past year, have supported our master gardener projects and activities.

Joyce Falkinburg

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## Feature Article

### Interview with Stephen Pryor, Delaware Botanic Garden

*On August 26, the ESVMG Master Gardeners toured the [Delaware Botanic Garden](#), and we all agreed that the garden has accomplished its vision “for beautiful, engaging gardens that inspire and educate.” As a follow up to our visit, Stephen Pryce, Head of Horticulture, agreed to answer some questions about the Meadow Garden designed by Piet Oudolf, a renowned Dutch garden designer, leading figure of the “[New Perennial](#)” movement and designer of gardens worldwide including New York City’s High Line.*

*Formerly the Director of Horticulture and Garden Operations at the Philadelphia Zoo, Stephen has only been with the Delaware Botanic Garden for six months but very knowledgeably lead our group throughout all of the garden zones. He says that he is “quickly learning the success and failures of such a large garden meadow design and finding solutions to help retain design integrity whilst managing the plant collection as they attain early maturity.”*



- **Please describe the vision for the Piet Oudolf Meadow Garden and how Oudolf's influence helped to attain this vision.**

Piet was invited to design a meadow that provides essential habitat for our native pollinators and birds. Piet selected a full-sun location and included 85% native perennials and grasses and 15% non-native pollinator compatible plants for extended season and pollinator interest.

The meadow is laid out as an infinity design with ten large beds in irregular shapes and curved gravel paths or lawn run throughout the meadow. There are three distinctive sections, lower, middle and upper, all with a different feel and planting palette.

Designed in 2016, it took 70,000 plants and two years to complete planting. Piet's passion for perennials and love of grasses is evident throughout the natural meadow design featuring a large number of regionally native plants, natives and non-natives. The meadow is a fine example of how Piet's influence has transformed the perennial movement worldwide and the way we garden with nature today.

- **What are some of the "star players" in the garden and why?**

*Amsonia hubrichtii* –Bluestar is an early season bloomer with pale blue flowers, ferny mounds of foliage and long-season Fall color.

*Echinacea pallida* 'Hula Dancer' - Early flowering coneflower with pale pink narrow petals dancing as they catch the slightest breeze, long-season seed heads for birds and insects.

*Sporobolus heterolepis* – Prairie dropseed is a great matrix groundcover weed-suppressing native perennial grass, that lends itself perfectly to planting around large groups of flowering perennial forbs and umbels.

*Senna marilandica* – Commonly known as wild senna, this stunning woody perennial native offers height and attractive seed pods in Fall; the bright yellow flowers are a delight in early

summer and adored by pollinators, butterflies and bees.

*Eryngium* 'Big Blue' - Sea Holly offers an interesting architecture to a garden and Big Blue is one of the best cultivars with steely blue bracts and long-lasting seed-heads that attract attention from visitors and wildlife alike.

*Kniphofia* 'Ice Queen' - Red-hot poker re-imagined! Ice Queen's lemon-white turrets in early Summer contrast well against grasses and forbs.

*Schizachyrium scoparium* 'Little Bluestem' - Grasses dominate Piet's design and with a number of Bluestem cultivars there is no shortage of interest from early Summer as these grasses emerge to late Fall where the dry stems catch the slightest coastal breeze.

- **Please describe some of the specialty areas neighboring the Meadow Garden such as the drainage ditch, the pond, and the inland dunes. What value do these areas add to the overall garden?**

The Rhyne, Learning Garden and Inland dunes are not part of Piet's meadow design; they are individual garden areas that focus on the educational elements for these types of endangered and poorly utilized gardens.



The Rhyne Garden

The Rhyne is our very own designer ditch with an array of native and native cultivars that provide long-season color and seasonal interest for wildlife and guests, whilst playing an important role in purifying storm water pollutants from the car parking area.

The Learning Garden is a fresh water pool that demonstrates the life giving power of pools. The plants and animals that depend upon them provide a wonderful contrast to the dry garden areas that surround this life-sustaining oasis.



The Learning Garden



The Inland Dunes

Inland dunes were topographic features created on the Delmarva Peninsula as the ice sheets receded. Over the eons, the inland dunes have been lost due to natural erosion and cultivation. Adding reconstructed inland dunes to DBG was a way to remind our guests of the special sense of place we find ourselves on Delmarva.

Inland Dunes in the gardens host native plants and support the local and migratory wildlife that visit them. As these dunes develop, the small trees, pines and grasses will provide shade and ecology for the plants and wildlife that enjoy life on the dunes.

- **What was it like at the beginning and how long has it taken for the Meadow Garden to get to this point? What are the future plans?**

The site was a soybean field, and the woodland was a thicket of briars. The Meadow Garden plants are 3-4 years old, and many are now filling the allotted space. Many will need division and some will be propagated in-house by seed. We are planting 84K Spring bulbs this Fall in the meadow.



Future garden plans are impressive and rely on support and fund raising. We look forward to creating new garden areas as these become attainable over the next decade.

- **How do you maintain the garden? What is the biggest challenge?**

The garden's day-to-day sustainable operations are managed by a team of three paid staff with a large pool of volunteers and docents to assist. Much of the work is completed by hand with only essential equipment or machinery for larger tasks and facilities maintenance.



The overly farmed fields left the garden with a stale and nutrient-deficient blank canvas. The soil whilst free-draining has very little organic content and whilst native plants thrive in these conditions the nativar's and non-natives can be hit or miss. We have lost some species completely and continue to source substitutes. Weed seeds and soil pathogens are our biggest challenge particularly with our environmental focus, we are sourcing alternative cultural control methods to maintain balance across all our garden locations.

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## Articles of Interest



### Meadow Gardening

by Jane McKinley, EMG

The popular garden movement right now is to “go native” and one way to do this is to plant a meadow garden. But the image of a “meadow garden” can be different to different people. Some think of it as a simple mix of fescue grasses, clover and, perhaps, a few other flowering plants. Others think of it as something resembling an old, English cottage garden with butterflies in abundance. In ecological terms, it is thought of as an early, successional stage of vegetation development; a process which, in our temperate region, begins with bare soil and evolves into a woodland or forest.

For the purposes of this article, I will view it as a mix of native grasses and forbs (herbaceous, flowering plants) that—once established—will remain fairly stable over many years. This, however, does not mean that it's totally hands-off (otherwise it will turn into that end-state woodland!)

### What to Expect

Meadows can provide an attractive and ecologically valuable landscape component on both large and small scales while lowering maintenance costs. They have the potential to displace at least some of the more mundane landscaping that is all too common - high maintenance lawns and predictable foundation shrubs - and, with their nectar, fruits, leaves and seeds, provide food and shelter for all shapes and sizes of wildlife, adding texture to a landscape that, when complete, will simply brim with life.

For years there has been a popular misconception that one can create a beautiful meadow in their yard by simply sowing some seeds from a “meadow in a can” or by letting a cleared area “go natural” – and then dispensing with the lawnmower at the next yard sale. Unfortunately, you've got to hold onto that mower; you just don't have to get it out as often. Otherwise, the resulting “meadow” can become a

tangled web of tree seedlings, out-of-control weeds, and invasives. If you're starting from seed, keep in mind that "patience is a virtue" since you will be about three years away from something that will begin to resemble a meadow. Also keep in mind that it's difficult if not impossible to have all parts of a meadow continually lit up in color from last to first frost.

Native grasses and forbs characterize mostly the midwestern United States, many now gone, and are generally referred to as "prairies." These meadows were a natural result of the climate, geology and soils of that region, as well as disturbances caused by large herds of grazing animals. But we Eastern Shore gardeners must recognize that a meadow is rarely a "natural" thing in the Coastal Plain region; however, it's not hard to mimic one with a little creativity and diligence.

### Prep Steps

If your meadow-to-be is currently lawn, or a patch of stubborn weeds, the first task is liberating the soil so that meadow plants can take hold. This can be done with something as

Turn an old field into a garden meadow by simply changing your mowing regime – once a year is all it takes once the garden is established.

rudimentary as a black tarp or plastic covering the space during the hottest weeks of summer. This will trap heat, solarizing the soil and killing all plants and seeds beneath it. A more eco-friendly option is to smother your turf grass with a layer of newspapers 20 sheets thick with wood chips on top or cover the area with heavy cardboard (I rescued mine from the recycle bin!) which will eventually leave healthy bare soil underneath.

A rototiller will work, too, but bear in mind this will disrupt the soil's strata and mycorrhizal communities, both of which are of tremendous benefit to native plant establishment.

Sometimes, the simplest option is best – physically digging out difficult weeds and sod while planting tough foundation natives in open spots which will start the process of meadow restoration. If planting in spring or summer, or if you don't have enough plant material to cover all available bare ground, it's a good idea to spread a layer of untreated, partially rotted wood mulch to tamp down erosion and lock in moisture. Lawn soils can be particularly devoid of critical nutrients and a layer of mulch will help invigorate the all-important microbiome community. On the flip side, lawn soils will also have a relatively small seed bank to battle and could potentially be seeded or planted soon after bringing it down to bare soil.

A reasonable way to turn an old field into meadow is simply to change your mowing regime. Mowing once (and only once!) a year after native composites like goldenrod, aster and ironweed have had time to set seed will help to lay a foundation of these workhorse plants. It must be kept in mind, however, on sites where a variety of plants had been thriving and going to seed for many years, there will be a huge seed bank that could take a number of years to deplete.

As far as soil amendment goes, natives have few, if any, special requirements ... that is, unless the area has been compacted or contaminated through urban or suburban activities. If so, extra steps will be required to bring the soil back to good health.

As with any landscape design project, a thorough site analysis is the basis for a successful design. Physical and environmental conditions such as sun and wind exposure, soil moisture and texture, along with functional and aesthetic considerations need to be factored into the plan. Draw a simple map identifying wet spots, dry spots, areas of shade and where the earth bakes in the afternoon sun. Note in which direction the prevailing winds travel and how the sun moves across the sky. Obviously, plants

### **Organizing the Palette**

In planning the Meadow Garden, it is helpful to organize plants into functional layers as described below.

#### **Matrix Layer**

This is the underlayment of a planting scheme which ties everything together. This layer provides a critical ground layer of up to 50% and is often unnoticed against the showier species in the garden. These plants fill in the gaps between the other larger plants, suppressing weeds and preventing soil erosion, and often spread by self-sowing or by stolons or rhizomes. Examples of matrix plants include Sensitive Fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*), Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Green and Gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*), and Self-Heal (*Prunella vulgaris*).

#### **Structure Layer**

Plants in the Structure layer give the garden its form and many times include a woody layer provided by trees and shrubs. These plants, sometimes referred to as 'punctuation plants,' persist the longest in the garden, serve as a garden mainstay, and carry the garden through the year. It is recommended that structural plants account for about 10% of the total planting. Examples of structure plants include Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina*), Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*), and Bluestar (*Amsonia hubrichtii*).

#### **Vignette Layer**

Vignettes are the eye candy in a garden planting and are what we most commonly associate with gardens. Vignettes are "the content within the frames created by structural plants" and occupy 30 – 50% of the design. Vignettes draw the eye and burst with seasonal color. These plant combinations keep the garden interesting while the matrix and structural plants provide the framework and underpinnings. These groupings give you creative license to mix various plant combinations and to include that beautiful plant that every gardener just "has to have!"

Source: "New Naturalism," by Kelly D. Norris

need to be chosen with needs and tolerances matching the growing conditions of the site. In planning your design, you'll have to give some consideration to your neighbors, especially if you live in an urban or suburb neighborhood. A front yard meadow will be more acceptable if it is accompanied by a manicured section of turf grass or well-tended garden; a meadow that reaches all the way to the street is much more likely to provoke controversy. You'll also want to determine if there are ordinances or rules of a homeowners' association that apply to your property.

Before you launch into your project full-steam-ahead, remember that it's a good idea to keep your meadow garden small at the beginning. A quarter of an acre may seem a reasonable size at first, but that space will demand a lot—especially in the first year of establishment.

#### **What to Plant**

Do your homework when considering what to plant in your meadow garden. Study publications such as the "Native Plants of Accomack and Northampton," visit professionally designed meadow gardens such as the Delaware Botanic Garden to learn what grows well together and to see the plants "in action," attend webinars and classes and talk to knowledgeable gardeners in your area who have experience to share. And find a nearby native plant community that

can be used as a model. Look around you at roadsides, open fields and existing meadows to see what thrives there. I recall the delight that I felt when discovering High-tide Bush (*Baccharis halimifolia*) growing along the roadside leading into Oyster – what a stunning fall show it puts on right here in our own “backyard!”

Most natural meadow ecosystems are dominated by up to 90% grasses. It is recommended, however, by most meadow-makers to plant a mix of about 60% grasses and 40% forbs — those perennially flowering plants we love. Because a meadow is dominated by grasses, they help stabilize soil, reduce erosion, increase water infiltration, and reduce stormwater runoff. Among all of the grasses native to our area, Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), Broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*) and Indiangrass

([\*Sorghastrum nutans\*](#)) are hardy, sun-loving structure plants and help

immensely with achieving the 60% grass requirement. Although I am not personally familiar with Indiangrass, sources say that it is an extremely drought-tolerant goliath, growing to eight feet tall in favorable conditions, sporting blue-green leaves, and adding interesting dimension with beautiful pale yellow foliage in the fall and large, erect inflorescences in summer. Another hardy grass to consider (not native to this region but recommended by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension) is Blue Gama Grass (*Bouteloua gracilis*) due to its “durability, attractiveness, and low

For wet meadows, turn to the stalwart group of plants known as the sedges (*Carex*). There’s a sedge for every kind of wet spot, from constant standing water to the “dry creek bed” that hosts water during rain events. Tussock Sedge (*Carex stricta*) is a good selection to start with.

Most natural meadow ecosystems are dominated by up to 90% grasses, however, most meadow-makers recommend a mix of about 60% grasses and 40% forbs.

maintenance ... and can also be mowed like a lawn once established.” And, of course, as recommended by Stephen Pryce in the feature article, Prairie Dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) and Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) are star players in the Delaware Botanic Garden’s Piet Oudolf Meadow Garden.

Perennial wildflowers add the bling of color throughout the growing season and can be grouped into vignettes or used as structural focal points. Consider Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), Spiked Gayflower (*Liatris spicata*), Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), and New York Aster (*Symphyotrichum novi-begii*). And, when it comes to flowers, be sure to include some annuals, especially those that will self-seed such as Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*).

When considering the soil condition, although amendments may not be necessary (that’s right –

*no soil test required!*), the existing moisture and sunlight conditions are important factors. For drier sites, many of the native grasses seed well and anchor soil, laying a green bedrock on which to get your meadow started. Rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*) can take a dry site and breaks up fields of green with silvery foliage and spiky, spherical, gray inflorescences. Common yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), and Southern Wax Myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*) are also good choices for dry meadow conditions.

Other moisture-loving natives include Bushy Bluestem (*Andropogon glomeratus*), Common Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Blue Mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) and Narrow-leaved Sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*).



For sites with moderate moisture, consider including Wild Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), Golden Tickseed (*Coreopsis tinctoria*), and Sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*). Another hardy selection, albeit



Penstemon plants have small, pod-like seed capsules that can be collected and sown in the fall. Or just let them do their own thing!

not native to this region, are the Beardtongues (*Penstemon* spp.) which have been referred to as “pioneer plants,” being among some of the first plants to colonize disturbed landscapes and offering a wide variety of choices for naturalizing when allowed to re-seed.

Most meadows offer bright, sunny conditions and the selections are endless. For shady edges or under the shadow of taller plants, consider introducing Rue Anemone (*Anemonella thalictroides*), Green and Gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*), and Alumroot (*Heuchera americana*).

### Keep it Up

Because our open fields are in an early successional stage which will gradually revert to mostly woody plants and trees over time, that means that some diligence must be applied to maintain the lovely meadow garden scene. Maintenance is the most critical for the first few years after installation, especially if the site preparation was less than ideal. Once past the curve of establishment, however, your maintenance tasks will take a nosedive.

Mowing once a year, preferably in late February through early March, eliminates tree seedlings, and functions as the ecological disturbance which stops the movement toward eventual woodland. One source suggests that you will have to mow more frequently during the first year before plants have a chance to go to flower and set seed. That stops unwanted plants from dropping new seeds for the following year. Unfortunately, all that mowing will prevent your desirable plants from blooming, too. But they’ll be growing and spreading and will eventually reward you with healthy mature plants that provide lots of gorgeous blooms!



Sorry, you gotta mow once a year once the meadow is established.

Besides mowing, occasional spot weed removal will be needed. And the reliably aggressive spreaders like mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum*) and New England aster (*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*) will need to be kept in check to avoid them out-competing your more delicate plants. Most of the time, this is needed only a few times per year. An exception to this rule is the removal of annual species such as Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*) and garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) which need to be pulled immediately in their first few months of arrival to prevent an untenable population explosion - it pays to be vigilant. Consider including tenacious natives in the mix that can hold their own against invasive exotics - this will help to keep out the unwelcomed neighbors.

## Final Thoughts

Unlike most maintained landscapes which are managed to look exactly the same from year to year, meadows can be dynamic and shifting. Plant “gifts” may show up in your meadow that weren’t installed or expected, but which you may decide to leave. Some of the short-term species in the mix may fade out. Plants may shift their location over time, in response to site conditions.

It’s important for the meadow gardener to recognize that this is one of many ways that natural landscaping in general, and meadows, in particular, are different from most of the landscaping that people are used to.

### Sources:

- Horticulture Magazine, [Meadow Garden Prep, Planting, and Care](#)
- Piedmont Master Gardeners, “[Meadow Gardening](#)” by Cathy Caldwell
- Ecological Landscape Alliance, “[Getting Real with Meadows](#)” by Nick Novick
- North Carolina Cooperative Extension, “[Giving Up on Traditional Turfgrass? Plant a Meadow Garden.](#)”

### Resources:

- [Southern Branch Nursery](#), Chesapeake, VA
- Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, [Native Plant Finder](#)



## Spring Bulbs for Fall Planting

by Jane McKinley, EMG

Bulbs provide beautiful blooming color and, when planted in the proper location, most return reliably year after year. Who can resist the crocus’s pop of color in late winter or what would spring be like without our lovely blooming daffodils and tulips?

Although there are many wonderful spring blooming bulbs to choose from, daffodils and tulips provide the quintessential look of spring. It’s not an accident that yellow daffodils immediately catch our eye, because yellow is the first color that the eye separates out of the spectrum. Daffodils will easily naturalize if given the proper growing conditions, however, tulips are a little more finicky. In North America, tulips won’t perennialize readily the way that daffodils often do. For this reason, most tulips should be treated as annuals and replanted frequently. According to Laurie Klingel, Head Horticulturist at Eyre Hall, only about 60% of tulips will

bloom the following year. However, some varieties, including Darwin hybrid tulips, are more likely than others to give a second or third season of blooms.

Spring blooming bulbs should be planted in the fall no sooner than the area's first frost date which, for the Virginia Eastern Shore, is around the end of October. It is important to get planting done about two weeks before the ground freezes so that the bulbs have time to settle in and grow roots. Fortunately, the ground doesn't freeze in our region until much later in the winter. So, we have some wiggle room here.

### Where to Plant Spring Bulbs

Bulbs look more natural and have far more appeal and visual impact when planted in groupings rather than in a straight line like soldiers. Planting in generous groups is more affordably done with bulbs than with other types of perennial plants, as bulbs are relatively inexpensive.

In selecting the planting site, it is important to consider the amount of sun they get after blooming, especially daffodils. When a daffodil bulb is planted in the fall, the flower grows the next spring by using the energy stored in the bulb. To recharge the bulbs for the following year, it is important that the remaining foliage after spring flowers receives plenty of sunlight. Thus, a daffodil planted in shade or under leaf canopy will be beautiful the first year but will struggle in subsequent years.

The amount of moisture in the planting bed is also an important consideration. Sites that are damp or poorly drained will shorten the life and performance of the bulbs. If planted in wet soil, they will be stressed and can get Fusarium wilt, a fungal disease which stunts their growth and ultimately leads to their demise.



Glory of the Snow

Little bulbs can grow in and among a yard's grass if it is not in a manicured, overly-watered, fertilized and weed-treated lawn. If growing little bulbs in a yard, mow the grass to 3.5 inches high. Not only will the grass grow deeper roots and be more drought tolerant, but the bulb foliage will also have the chance to mature. Crocuses, snowdrops (*Galanthus*), and glory of the snow (*Chionodoxa*) are good candidates for your yard. Also, be aware of where the bulbs are planted so that, in the future, they will not be disturbed when planting other perennials or shrubs around them.

### Selecting, Planting and Managing Spring Bulbs

Bulbs can be purchased from the local garden market or from a catalog, each having its own advantages. When selecting bulbs, purchasing locally allows you to select the largest, firmest bulbs which will generally perform better and have a much better display. Look for firmness, which indicates a healthy fresh bulb, and avoid any bulb that feels soft or mushy. The disadvantage to purchasing locally is that your selection will be limited. Online or catalog ordering is ideal for the largest selection, and the quality from a reliable bulb company will easily outshine what you find in big-box stores.

Always plant bulbs with the pointy end toward the sky. The other end is usually wider and has tiny root hairs. Plant to a depth of three times the bulb's height. For instance, a bulb that is 2 inches tall should be planted 6 inches deep. Space bulbs three times their width apart if planting in the garden. In a container, bulbs can be planted more densely.

Amend the soil with compost and humus to improve drainage and fertility and to feed the soil microbes that turn minerals into plant-available nutrients. After planting, you can also top-dress the soil with bone meal or a slow-release organic fertilizer that is formulated for bulbs. Be sure to avoid putting any fertilizer in the planting hole with the bulb. Adding a 2-inch layer of mulch over your newly planted bulbs will help retain moisture and keep the soil warmer a bit longer so roots can more quickly establish. Klingel uses mushroom compost vs. mulch. Finally, after planting, water in and maintain some moisture to ensure success.

Because bulbs flower at different times of year, there are strategies that can be employed for continuous blooms in the garden. For instance, bulbs that bloom sequentially can be planted in the same hole. At the bottom of the planting hole, place large, late-blooming bulbs. Cover them with soil and then place a layer of medium-sized, mid-season bulbs. Use small, early bloomers as the top-most layer of bulbs.

After the flowers finish blooming there are a couple of important considerations. First, when a bloom is finished, deadhead it. If left alone, the flowers will set seed, and the plant will put about 30% of its energy into producing those seeds. It's better if the plant puts that energy into the bulbs than into seeds you don't need.

Next, leave the foliage alone for at least eight weeks to allow time for the energy to flow back into the bulb. Once the leaves turn yellow, the bulbs are dormant, and the foliage is safe to cut. In the meantime, grit your teeth while the foliage dies back, leaving an unsightly mess (this is why I prefer to plant bulbs in the distance, not along a walkway or in the front of a bed where you can see them up close!).

### **Companion Planting**

Other than planting them front and center, another strategy for managing the declining foliage is to plant bulbs among grasses, groundcovers, and perennials. This will disguise their dying foliage, provide physical support for slender stems or top-heavy stalks, and will absorb the moisture in the soil to help keep the bulbs dry.

Similar to layering bulbs for successional bloom, you can also create a sequence of blooms in conjunction with the perennials in your garden, staging them to flower right before the perennials go into bloom. Or, you can consider tucking the early bulbs into low-growing evergreen groundcovers and adding later blooming bulbs in and amongst taller groundcovers. Look for spaces that are filled in the fall but empty or underutilized early in the year. To locate these spots in the fall, lift the sprawling mature foliage around clump-forming perennials to find empty spaces that are perfect for filling with



Thank you to Brent for providing information for this article! And there's another "Thank You" that's in order: for giving 25% of all sales generated to participating organizations under the Bloomin' Bucks program. And ESVMG is participating!

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bulbs. Another strategy is to take pictures of your garden in the spring to find empty spaces that are ideal for spring blooming bulbs.

A perfect spot for planting daffodils can be in sunny sites where there are spaces between the cropped crowns of ornamental grasses, such as prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) and 'Karl Foerster' feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora*). Daffodils also work well planted along with daylilies. Mondo grass makes a good companion for short-stemmed bulbs such as grape hyacinth (*Miscari armeniacum*), winter aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*), and snowdrops (*Galanthus* spp.). Hostas are excellent partners for spring bulbs in sites that get some shade in summer, as their expanding foliage will do a great job of spreading out to cover the yellowing bulb foliage.

But don't make the mistake that I did last year by planting Ostrich Fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*), a partial- to full-shade loving plant, in a sunny location in front of daffodils which need the sun!

### Keeping the Critters Away

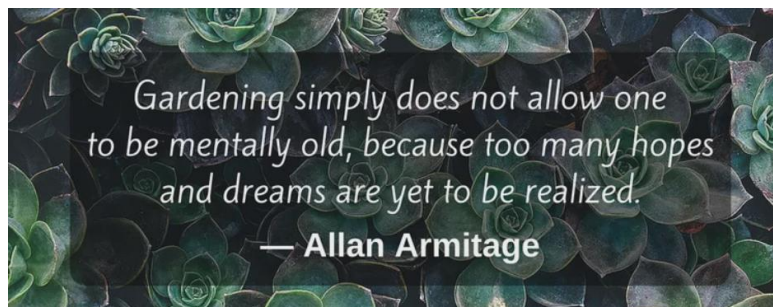


In her talk at the Oct general meeting, Laurie Klingel showed us 10" wire bulb baskets custom made for keeping the voles away.

Bulbs that are labeled deer and rabbit resistant, such as daffodils and alliums, should be mostly unbothered by critters, including voles. Bulbs that are considered tasty, such as tulips, should be treated with a repellent. Voles love tulip and crocus bulbs. The bulbs themselves can be treated with an organic animal repellent, such as [Plantskydd](#), to prevent vole damage. Let the product dry on the bulb, and it will mask the smell which attracts voles and squirrels.

If you aren't into using repellents, consider wrapping the bulb with a layer of wire mesh or screen with openings around ½ inch. That will keep the critters from digging up your bulbs and stealing the show for next spring. Be sure, however, to remove the wire from the top of the bulb before the new foliage emerges next spring.

Daffodils are practically critter-proof and are distasteful to most insects. In fact, critters generally leave all members of the Amaryllidaceae family alone, which includes amaryllis, daffodils, snowdrops, and snowflakes. Alkaloids in this plant family not only taste terrible but also render somewhat of a narcotic stupor – thus the name Narcissus, coming from the Greek word “narco” which means intoxicated, was chosen for the daffodil genus.



## Gardeners' Tips

### FALL 'TO DO' LIST

*Just like in Spring, Fall brings with it a zillion things for the gardener's To Do List. The focus this time of year is on cleaning up and preparing the garden beds for the winter season and, of course, planting bulbs. As you are doing these things, you might want to keep these tips in mind.*

**Prepare for the first frost.** Dig up tender perennials such as cannas, begonias, and gladiolus. However, Elephant Ear may be able to winter over in our climate. Discard the tops and store bulbs, corms, and rhizomes in dry peat moss or vermiculite.



**Feed the birds.** Restock bird feeders and put out fresh water daily to help birds migrating southward and those who hang around through the winter.

Consider leaving your Elephant Ear bulbs in the ground if planted in a protected site that doesn't have standing water. Otherwise, brush them off, dry and wrap them in paper, and store in a cool, dry place.

**Prepare your lawn for winter.** Unless you have a lot of leaves, skip raking and mow over them to chop them into smaller pieces that will add nutrients to the soil. Avoid fertilizing unless you have been advised to do so through a soil test. Instead, aerate and sprinkle compost or humus over the grass to give it a good start for next spring.

**Avoid removing dying foliage.** Stop deadheading perennials in the early fall and leave the dying leaves and stems until the early spring. This plant material will provide both food and shelter for wildlife, including many pollinators like native bees who overwinter in standing stems and brush.

**Add mulch.** A top dressing of 4- to 5-inches of mulch in the fall helps to retain moisture, keeps the soil warm, and adds nutrients to the soil. And it looks great! As a master gardener, however, you know to avoid creating "mulch volcanoes" around the base of trees, which hide the root flare and weaken the tree.

**Expand planting areas and create new garden beds.** Fall is a good time for setting up new raised beds or smothering grass where you want to convert part of your yard to a garden bed. Laying a 4-6" layer of straw or covering the area with cardboard or newspaper topped with natural mulch will get the process started so that the bed will be ready for spring planting.

**Plant a cover crop.** Sometimes called green manure because they add nitrogen to the soil, cover crops also break up soil clods, insert organic matter, attract soil organisms, and, when rotted, create empty channels for the soil food web to live in. Although cover crops can be planted any time (except the dead of winter), fall is a good time to plant fava beans, field peas, vetch, and clover.

*Fall 'To Do' List Continued*

**Prepare garden tools for winter.** Clean hand tools, sharpen blades, drain hoses and irrigation lines, clean out sprayers, and drain gas lines from mowers, weed whackers, and tillers. Or, better yet, consider replacing your gasoline powered engines with battery operated ones to help keep the air free of carbon exhaust!

**Collect and store seeds.** Seeds from many types of annuals can be saved and planted in the spring. These include celosia, petunia, cosmos, nasturtium, and coneflower. Store them in a cool, dry place.



## KNOW YOUR NATIVES

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

### Little Bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium*



Little Bluestem is a perennial grass that creates very dense mounds that reach up to at 1 ½ - 4'. Preferring full sun to part shade, it grows naturally along woodland edges, on hillsides and slopes, and in open areas. This grass is wonderful planted in groupings and provides a changing visual palate ranging from blue-green stems in late summer to radiant mahogany-red, white tufted seed heads in fall. A reddish-tan color persists during winter. Stephen Pryce praises its beauty when he says "there is no shortage of interest from early Summer as these grasses emerge to late Fall where the dry stems catch the slightest coastal breeze."

In Winter, the fuzzy white seeds of Little Bluestem are of particular value to small birds by providing food as well as giving shelter and nesting material throughout the year. It is also of value to native bees.



## FEE FOR PLANT DISEASE CLINIC SERVICES

As of Oct 1, a \$35 fee, which applies to both digital and physical samples, is now charged for samples submitted to the VA Tech Plant Disease Clinic. There will be no additional fee if the problem is not able to be diagnosed from a digital submission and a physical sample is requested or if a sample is diagnosed as “Insufficient” requiring a second sample (representing the same plant/problem) to be submitted. An “insufficient” diagnostic report must be included when re-submitting the second sample. Additionally:

- Refunds will not be given.
- The \$35 fee applies only to samples submitted to the Plant Disease Clinic. There is no fee for the Insect Identification Lab3 or Weed Identification Clinic.
- Payment must be made either through Destiny One via credit card or through providing check or cash directly to the local VCE office.

**Note:** The fee for a basic soil test is still \$10, plus shipping. A recent mailing of two samples cost about \$9. A soil container along with instructions can be picked up at your local extension office and forms are available online.

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## What We’ve Been Up To

*In addition to all the fall garden clean up activities taking place right now, our unit has been busy touring, selling, playing and learning! Here are some of the activities that took place this summer.*

### Annual Picnic

The picnic, held outside on June 6 at Julie Cardinale’s lovely home, was a great success. We counted 39 gardeners plus our speaker Ellen Stromdahl who gave a very informative – and a little scary - 40 minute talk on ticks. Ellen retired as an epidemiologist for the US Army as the top tick expert.

Everyone brought a covered dish or drinks, and we had a plastic and Styrofoam free lunch. And – the best part – Julie got a chance to “show off my gardens which I'm not shy about!”





## Tour of Delaware Botanic Garden

On August 26, a group of ESVMG Master Gardeners participated in a guided tour of the Delaware Botanic Garden. This delightful garden was just beginning to transition into its fall display, and there was lots to see, from the Piet Oudolf Meadow Garden to the Woodland Gardens and Knoll Garden. The Meadow Garden is featured in this issue with an interview with Stephen Pryce, Director of Horticulture.



Janet Rochester, Jennifer Alley, Diane D'Amico, Marianne Francavilla, Phil Goetkin, Jane McKinley and Jocelyn Grover enjoyed a beautiful day of blooms & inspiration at the Delaware Botanic Garden.

## Fall Plant Sale

ESVMG held its annual plant sale on September 11. We could not have asked for more perfect weather nor more generous donors. Those lucky customers who arrived at 9:00 were greeted by enthusiastic



Master Gardener Volunteers and gorgeous plants. We had rose bushes, nandina, pansies, azalea, boxwood, and so much more. We sold out before our end time of noon.

Our thanks to everyone who bought and donated. The funds raised will not only go to beautifying the Eastern Shore but also to educate children and adults of the importance of plant, flower and vegetable gardening.

## THINGS OF NOTE

Great news! A scholarship of \$100.00 (the program fee) has been approved for a worthy individual interested in attending the upcoming MG training starting in January 2022. To be eligible, applicant **MUST**:

1. **Be nominated** by an active member of the ESVMG Association.
2. **Submit** a signed Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Volunteer Agreement
3. **Submit** a completed and signed Extension Master Gardener Application

The upcoming class will be held in the AREC classroom on Wednesdays, 8:45 am – 3:00 pm, Jan 12 – Apr 27, 2022. For more information, contact Christine Williams at [clwil20@gmail.com](mailto:clwil20@gmail.com).

The fruits of the spring Plant Sale & Clinic which was held in Cape Charles this year have now ripened! Except for a couple of books that are out of print, most of the books approved for CE are now available from the Cape Charles library and through the Eastern Shore Public Library system. Click [here](#) to see the list. And [here](#) to go to the Eastern Shore Public Library website.

The Re-enrollment forms are back again. Please complete and return the form along with your \$20 annual dues as soon as possible. Checks (written to ESVMG) & completed forms can be mailed to Cindy Ray, ESVMG Treasurer. The form can be printed by going to:

<https://app.betterimpact.com/Volunteer/Main/StoredDocument/79389>

Don't forget to enter your CE and Vol hours into the [Better Impact](#) system! It is getting down to the wire and, if you don't get them in before the end of the year, you may not be able to retain your Master Gardener status. This is important ... just sayin.

Elections are coming up for 2022. Folks to serve on the Nominating Committee and those interested in taking a leadership role (however small) are needed. Please contact Joyce if you are interested in finding candidates or if you, yourself, are interested in stepping up. Positions available are Vice-President, Secretary, and Membership-at-Large Representatives for both counties.

## UPCOMING 2021 EVENTS

Dec 7, 11:30                      Annual Holiday Luncheon\*  
The Island House, Wachapreague

\*volunteers needed to help with planning, set up, and table decorations. Contact Julie Cardinale to offer your services.

## 2020-21 ESVMG BOARD MEMBERS

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

## COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

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

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

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