



# Backyard Views

The Backyard Gardeners

Spring, 2011

The Backyard Gardeners, Inc. was established in 2007 as a non-profit organization to provide free education to homeowners in the Hampton Roads area on gardening and horticultural practices, designs and techniques in order to encourage conservation of our natural resources, the enjoyment of gardens, garden-related activities and creative garden art.

## Calendar of Events

Garden Talks, 7-8:30 pm  
Chesapeake Library  
298 Cedar Road

**March 15**

*"Effective Landscaping with  
Trees and Shrubs"*

Doug Spencer, Lowe's & Virginia  
Beach Master Gardeners

**April 19**

*"Propagation 101"*

Vickie Pepper  
Norfolk, Botanical Gardens

**May 17**

*"It's Bonsai, Baby"*

Ronnie Baum,  
Virginia Bonsai Society

### EVENTS

**March 19-21**

Virginia Beach Spring Craft Show  
Virginia Beach Convention Center

**April 16**

TBG Spring Garden Faire & 3rd  
Annual Plant Sale Tour

9-3 pm

Chesapeake Central Library and  
locations TBA

**May 21**

Bonsai class with Ronnie Baum  
2708 N Landing Rd., Va. Beach

## Taking the next step...Organic Vegetable Gardening by Audrey Knall



If you're like 38% of American households (including our President's), you plant a home vegetable garden either in beds or containers. We do it for a variety of reasons: a less costly source of vegetables, a wider variety of vegetables, to ensure the safety and quality of the foods that we feed our families, or to help the planet by reducing our carbon footprints. All of these results can be achieved with standard gardening practices, but

to really get the most you can out of your gardening efforts, try growing your vegetables ORGANICALLY.

According to the IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements), "Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, bio diversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects". While there are varying levels of organic gardening, it is generally accepted that no artificial pesticides or fertilizers are used.

Basic Gardening Practices for organic gardening:

1. The foundation of the organic garden is maintaining the integrity and **health of the soil**. By integrating organic material into the soil it will retain its crumbly texture, hold water better, and allow plants to take up nutrients more efficiently. Therefore, you will grow healthier plants, which can better resist pests and diseases. It is recommended you replenish the organic matter in your garden soil by working compost into the top 4 inches a month prior to planting; plant cover crops instead of letting soil stay bare in between vegetables; have a soil test done for the vegetables you intend to plant and amend the soil as necessary with organic fertilizers and rotate crops on a 3-yr cycle to reduce diseases and depletion of nutrients in the soil.
2. Learn to **water properly!** Proper watering techniques will maintain the health of your vegetables and reduce the need to fight diseases. Use drip irrigation, so all the water is directed at the roots-keeping water off the leaves will reduce diseases; water deeper/longer but less frequently-roots will grow deeper and be better able to withstand periods of high heat and drought; water early in the day, so leaves and fruit can dry out before cooler temps of the night preventing the development of fungal diseases; mulch, mulch, mulch. Mulching around the plants will reduce stress & water evaporation. It can also reduce soil born diseases from splashing onto plants.
3. **Fight pests and diseases** organically. Even perfect soil and watering techniques will not guarantee a disease and pest free garden. We've already touched on ways of reducing diseases with proper soil preparation, mulching and watering. Here are more ways to combat pests and diseases: inspect your plants regularly to identify pests and diseases-some pests can be picked off by hand or use organic products such as horticultural soaps and oils according to package directions if necessary; do not crowd your plants-plant according to package spacing to allow sufficient air circulation to reduce diseases; keep the garden clean-rotting fruit and leaves are havens for pests and diseases; keep as many plants off the ground using supports as possible; consider companion planting and incorporating beneficial flowers into the veggie garden to control pests.

Now that it's been de-mystified, try growing your veggies organically this year!

# Spotlight on Gardens



## Virginia Zoological Park in Norfolk *by Anne Rouquie*

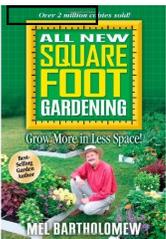
Lions and Tigers and Bears, Oh My! But what about those gardens?

Since 1900 Hampton Roads has been privileged to have not only a remarkable collection of animals but an equally spectacular array of plants. Fifty-three acres of Zoo grounds include theme gardens, wetlands, and transitional garden beds each of which is grown organically. There are Butterfly, Color, Herb, Rose, Rain, Shade, Tropical, a Virginia Barnyard garden with heirloom vegetables, an African Village garden and a soon to be opened, newly expanded “Trail of the Tiger” exhibit with an Asian temple theme and 12 pagodas. And, while our climate may not support some plants in a specific garden perhaps because of high humidity or winter chill, the Zoo staff makes every effort to mimic plants with those more adaptable to our zone 7A/B environment. Check out the website [www.virginiazoo.org](http://www.virginiazoo.org) and click on Horticulture and find a description of each theme garden as well as a list of specific plants in each exhibit.

The Zoo is a large example of how we as homeowners should approach our yards and gardens and “conservation” is the key. The *all organic* environment shows us how beautiful and effective a chemical free garden can be. Yes, even the Rose garden is breathtaking. Animals, birds and butterflies as well as beneficial insects can browse the plant material and thrive in the habitats. Many plants are grown as treats for the animals to supplement their regular food. From the Herb garden, the tigers purr for rosemary and fennel is the monkey’s choice. Numerous veggies from the Virginia Barnyard garden excite the Zoo’s herbivores. And since the Zoo is bordered by the Lafayette River, every effort is made to minimally impact the waterway by using water-wise techniques. The Rain gardens are designed to filter and absorb water runoff before it reaches the storm drains and ultimately the river. Drip irrigation is used only in those areas which may require more water but only if a lack of sufficient rainfall.

Earlier this winter, the staff and volunteers planted nearly 5,000 plants for cold weather interest. This spring there will be over 300 additional varieties of plants to enhance the theme gardens. The gardens of the Zoo are a constantly changing panorama for the senses and should at least be visited seasonally.

## Book Review *by Gary Bennett.*



After hearing Gill Gillespie’s views on vegetable gardening, at our January “Garden Talk”, I wanted to learn more and get information on the square foot gardening method. So, I picked up my older Square Foot Gardening book by Mel Bartholomew and started to read. The important facts became apparent. You need to select a sunny

location, amend the soil with compost or purchased garden soil and plant your garden using the specific planting plan designed for square foot gardening.

The author presents a number of gardening techniques many of which are applicable to gardening in general. He discusses the benefits of planned and precise planting methods to better utilize your available space & staggered plantings to extend your harvests.

The new version, All New Square Foot Gardening, is an invaluable resource for beginner, intermediate and expert gardeners offering advice on gardening in general, crop selection and seed starting techniques, alternative growing spaces like container gardening and ways to extend the growing season.

It’s time to get out in the yard and start working the soil. Let’s get digging using whatever method you decide is best.

## Garden Hints *by Patty Bennett*

- ✿ Clay pots are excellent cloches for young emerging plants. Place them over the plants to protect them from sudden late frosts. Remove during the day if temperatures get warm to avoid burning the plant.
- ✿ Paint the handles of your garden tools a bright or fluorescent color so you will be able to find them easily once you start your spring garden chores. Wrapping them in colorful tape also works.
- ✿ Cut or chop banana peels into pieces and work them into the soil around your rose bushes. The potassium in the skin will give your roses a boost.

You may request to be added to the newsletter mailing list at

[www.thebackyardgardeners.org](http://www.thebackyardgardeners.org)

or by emailing [gardenguru@thebackyardgardeners.org](mailto:gardenguru@thebackyardgardeners.org).



# Spring Garden Events Calendar 2011

## March

- 4-6 McDonald's Garden Center Hampton, "Outdoor Show", 9am-6 pm
- 4-6 VB Convention Center, "Mid Atlantic Home & Flower Show"
- 18-20 VB Convention Center, "Spring Craft Show" TBG will be there.
- 19 Elizabethan Gardens "Going Green for Herbs" Plant and Gift Shoppe Sale.  
Chefs cooking with herbs in reception hall
- 26 Norfolk Botanical Gardens, Virginia Camellia Society Spring Show & Plant Sale
- 26 & 27 Gloucester 25th Annual Daffodil Festival
- 26 & 27 White's Nursery Spring Kick-Off Weekend
- 27 Norfolk Botanical Gardens, "March into Spring", 2 mile Family Fitness Walk,  
2-4 pm, free with garden admission (check web site to register)

## April

- 4-Oct 13 Botanical Gardens, "Bike Night" Every Mon, Wed and Thurs night from 4-7  
pm, free with garden admission.
- 9 & 10 The Daffodil Festival (Chincoteague) at the Chincoteague Center
- 12-14 Great Dismal Swamp Birding Festival, 757-986-3705 for registration, free
- 13-15 Norfolk Botanical Gardens, Virginia Bonsai Society Exhibit and Sale
- 15 The Hermitage "Spring Heirloom Plant Sale" 10 am-3 pm
- 16 & 17 White's Nursery Free Easter Egg Hunt
- 16 The Backyard Gardeners, "Spring Garden Faire", Chesapeake Central Library,  
9 am- 3 pm
- 16 "Third Annual Spring Plant Sale Tour", participants TBA
- 16 Currituck Master Gardener's Spring Plant Sale
- 16 Elizabethan Gardens, "Spring Fever Gift Shoppe Sale"
- 16-23 Historic Garden Week in Virginia
- 23 & 24 White's Nursery Free Easter Egg Hunt
- 21 The Hermitage "Sunsets on the River" 6-9 pm Refreshments & Live Music
- 30-May 1 Fred Heutte Center "30th Annual Sensational Art & Spring Craft Show & Herb  
Sale" (April 30<sup>th</sup> 9 am – 4 pm and May 1<sup>st</sup> 10 am – 4 pm) TBG will be there.

## May

- 5 The Hermitage "Sunsets on the River" 6-9 pm Refreshments & Live Music
- 7 & 8 White's Nursery Celebrates "Mom is Queen for the Day"
- 6 & 8 Norfolk Botanical Gardens "Spring Plant Sale" 10 am – 5 pm free with paid  
admission
- 8 Elizabethan Gardens "Mothers Day Gift and Plant Sale"
- 14 Coastal Gardening Festival, Baum Community Center, Kitty Hawk NC 10am-2  
pm
- 14 & 15 White's Nursery Butterfly and Bee Gardens
- 19 The Hermitage "Sunsets on the River" 6-9 pm Refreshments & Live Music
- 21 Bonsai Class w/Ronnie Baum (2708 N Landing Rd, Va. Beach, \$50 for all  
materials, 10 am-3 pm
- 28 & 29 White's Nursery Geranium Festival