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THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT  
**EXTENSION**  
MASTER GARDENER

## UVM Extension Master Gardener Program News March 2020

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Dear Master Gardeners, Composters and Alumni,



in good spirits despite being stuck at home. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly opened the beginning of the gardening and volunteering season for all of us. Due to the closures mandated around the state all in-person volunteer activity has been postponed until [April 15](#). Until then we want you to know that there are many great learning opportunities available to you, as well as some remote ways to get in your volunteer hours. If you're an Alumni, now's your chance to become "Active" again. We are all learning ways to connect remotely. You might consider using Zoom, or write about your gardening ideas to each other our new Google Classroom Forum. If you are a project leader, consider hosting a zoom meeting for your group of volunteers to check-in and let them know what you are thinking about for your project in the upcoming season. If you are a chapter leader, consider hosting a chapter meeting online. If you are a volunteer consider hosting an online meeting with other volunteers to chat about a fun gardening topic and share tips. Our volunteer community needs to stay connected during this difficult time. Hang in there everyone and please let us know how we can support you.

~Beret, Lisa, Cindy

## Volunteer Project Spotlights



## on her first year of volunteering

I have just finished my first year as a master gardener intern in Southern Vermont. It is hard to believe that just a year ago I sat in this same bright corner of my kitchen reading articles and taking notes to prepare for class every week. Taking the class was a game-changer for me in terms of my confidence as a gardener. Prior to the class, I had many disparate bits of knowledge about plant biology, soil science, and landscape and pest management. The class allowed me to tie it all together in a much deeper understanding. Becoming a master gardener intern has also enabled me to absorb and apply new information because of the solid framework and breadth the course provided. In the year that has followed the course, I have looked for ways to be active and helpful in my community.

My first project was to help with our chapters annual plant sale. We had a bright and beautiful day at the Bennington Farmers Market. We sold 215 plants to about 50 buyers. It was fun to see people so excited about finding new plants for their landscapes and being able to help them with questions. Many people came through looking for clarification about sun/shade and growth habits but also asked impromptu questions about plants they wanted to identify and what to do about invasive species in their yards. It was clear that people left the sale with the satisfaction of increasing their garden stock and looked forward to the spring regrowth with a healthy mindset. The best part was the sense of comradery that came from spending the day with like-minded plant enthusiasts. I really enjoyed getting to know the other master gardeners in the area. We laughed a lot, and it was a great day for all.

The second project I worked on was at the Old First Church Marker Garden in Old Bennington. This marker is in front of an important historical site in the town of Bennington and is visited by numerous tourists throughout the year. The goal is to maintain the monument for historical preservation purposes. In keeping with the crisp white lines of the church with its lovely Palladian window, the white daffodils, astilbe and surrounding beautiful green leaves of the myrtle and ferns is a simple and elegant compliment to the monument. It was nice to spend time in the early mornings making sure the garden looked its best. I loved driving by later in the day to see visitors reading the monument and photographing the flowers.

Finally, the last project I started working with was the Yellow Barn Community Garden in Arlington. This site is at the beginning of becoming a resource for the town. As part of the committee, I have been working toward getting an after school gardening program off the ground, developing a social media presence, and helping to create the mission of the Yellow Barn. It is an exciting project and I look forward to seeing where it goes. There are many people involved who are committed to the success of this project.

Overall it has been a rich year. I have met a lot of wonderful people and through volunteering, I continue to learn, even though my days as a student in the course are over. I am so grateful for the scholarship program for making it possible for me to be a part of this amazing community.



Master Gardener Heidi Racht did a great job answering questions at this year's farm show at the Champlain Valley Expo in January. Thank you so much to everyone who volunteered at this event!





### Master Composter David Pistilli Shares about his Composting System

This is the evolution of a project I started seven years ago when we first moved here. My wife's a great cook and generates large quantities of biodegradable refuse, which I couldn't stand to put in the garbage. I bought my first bin from the local transfer station (ACSWMD — great station) and quickly found that a) it filled up way faster than I thought it would and b) I couldn't even rot garbage properly. That led to the second bin, and the third, and ... you get the picture.

It also led me to take the master composter class the second year to see if I could unlock the secret of proper rotting, and the best thing I learned is that composting is like making spaghetti sauce — every household has their own way, and most taste pretty good. Our instructor advised us to do what works for us which, for me, meant this sort of production line where I kept transferring and amending until I finally got finished compost about two years later.

This past summer, we landscaped the side of the house I had been using as my composting lab, so I approached the neighbor to use space he wasn't. He was happy to comply, and I relocated my bins to the side of his garage and repurposed an ugly screening fence into holding bins for a) the vegetation we develop from our yards (the proverbial brush pile), b) the shredded wood mulch I use as ground cover in front of the project, and c) the finished compost! I've been able to donate compost to three of my gardening neighbors so far (I can't properly be said to garden), as well as use it myself as a soil amendment for my "lawn."

I think I've reached equilibrium at seven bins but could go as big as nine if it attracts the interest of my other three or four neighbors. This fall, I was able to use three of the bins to store shredded leaf mulch, the dry matter I make every year to amend the compost the remainder of the year.

## Congratulations to our 2019 Newly Certified Master Gardener & Composters!

Welcome to our community



Carol Blakely, Ollie Cultrara, Sarah M. Edelman, Marion Gerardi, Regina Hazel, Andrea Landsberg, Ann Lawless  
Mark McMahon, Amy Record, Dan Steinbauer, Karen Tuininga, Martha Beauchamp, Carol Blakely, Stina Booth, Katherine  
Borne, Rebecca Cerge, Mia Clark, Tina Ettenborough, Lynn Gardner, Marion Gerardi, Irene Goyette, Mimi Carter Haley,  
Barbara Headrick, Donna Hisson, Susan Hale Kahan, Christine Kucipeck, Douglas MacDonald, Karen Moran, Diane Winchell  
Raymond, Jessie Schilling, Elli Shiva, Dustin R. Smith, Robin Smith, Peg Solon, Emily Sosnoff, Susan Still, Lucinda Kittredge  
Sullivan, Robin Tompkins, Jennifer Trapani, Brian Wagner, Marsha Wayler, Joan West

Does the COVID-19 pandemic have you thinking



Here are a few research-based resources to get started:

### **COVID-19 Facts for Community Gardens, Garden Managers & Gardeners**

[https://extension.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/univ\\_of\\_illinois\\_community\\_gardens\\_covid-19\\_032020.pdf](https://extension.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/univ_of_illinois_community_gardens_covid-19_032020.pdf)

### **Considerations for Fruit & Vegetable Growers related to Coronavirus**

<https://blog.uvm.edu/cwcallah/2020/03/18/considerations-for-fruit-and-vegetable-growers-related-to-coronavirus-covid-19/>

### **Planning Before Planting a Vegetable Garden**

<https://thevegetablegarden.info/gardening-articles/200-planning-before-planting-vegetable-gardens>

<https://ag.umass.edu/home-lawn-garden/fact-sheets/planning-vegetable-garden>

### **Vegetable Gardening in Small Spaces**

<https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/2761e/>

### **Local Tomato Plant Sources**

[https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Extension-Master-Gardener/buylocaltomatos2011\\_000.pdf](https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Extension-Master-Gardener/buylocaltomatos2011_000.pdf)

### **An Educators Guide to Gardening**

<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/catalog/files/project/pdf/em9032.pdf>

I've posted **Free access** to the lecture on **Vegetable Gardening** that we use for the Master Gardener course since now is the perfect time to start thinking about growing veggies. The directions for joining the classroom are below. Please note, you do need to have a google account to join, or you will need to create one.

**Link:** [classroom.google.com](https://classroom.google.com)

**Class Code:** ntbqg52

### **How to Join a Google Classroom with a class code:**

1. Go to [classroom.google.com](https://classroom.google.com) and click Sign In. Sign in with your Google Account. For example, [you@yourschool.edu](mailto:you@yourschool.edu) or [you@gmail.com](mailto:you@gmail.com). ...
2. At the top, click **Add. Join Class**.
3. Enter the **class code** your teacher gave you and click Join. A class code consists of 6 or 7 letters or numbers.
4. Click on the **"Classwork"** tab to see the **Vegetable Gardening Lecture**, and go to the

\*\*Please use good internet etiquette and be thoughtful and respectful in your posts.

## In the Garden

### Seed Starting Tips by Gordon Clark



Starting your own seeds indoors is time-consuming (as opposed to buying starts at the nursery), but it offers great benefits including money saved, virtually limitless choice of varieties and the joy of watching live things sprout while the landscape outside is still covered in snow.

Here are some tips that will help produce the most successful seed starts possible.

When to start: Smaller, generally cold-weather plants (lettuces, greens and brassicas) should be started about 4 weeks before you plan to put them outside. Larger warm-weather plants (such



Calculate the outdoor transplant date (therefore your indoor starting date) based on the last frost date in your U.S. Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zone (<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov>). For times from starting seeds to transfer, refer to <http://go.uvm.edu/growingvegetables>

You can put the plants outside 4-6 weeks earlier with the use of simple low tunnels. For instructions on how to build a low tunnel, check out <http://go.uvm.edu/lowtunnels>.

Growing medium: Seed-starting mixes are generally made up of sphagnum peat moss and vermiculite. If you start with one of those, you will need to fertilize soon after the seeds emerge or pot up your plants in a growing mix containing more nutrients.

Nurseries sell special seed-starting mixes that contain mycorrhizae, a fungus that helps young plant roots access water and nutrients to become established more quickly. A 50/50 mix of compost and peat moss also will work fine and save you some money.

Don't use regular garden soil. It will work, but the more compacted, less nutritious soil will likely lower the seedling growth rate, plus you're importing whatever pathogens are in the soil, as opposed to starting with a clean mix.

Lighting: Avoid starting seeds in windows as they will grow tall and spindly. As bright as it might appear to us, even a south-facing window is a pale imitation of the ambient totality of outdoor sunlight. The only time I've seen this work other than in a greenhouse is in a southeast corner that had large unobstructed windows facing in both directions.

For artificial lighting, use cool white fluorescent bulbs. Avoid incandescents, which skew too much to the red side of the spectrum and produce heat that can harm or kill young plants.

Advances over the past 20 years have led to bulbs little thicker than pencils, but whatever thickness you use, get bulbs that produce the maximum amount of lumens. Bulbs designed specifically for plant growth are commercially available and cost more.

Typically, 14-18 hours of light a day is considered optimal (timers help). Some seeds germinate best in the dark while germination for other seeds is stimulated by the light. Seed catalogs and packets often will indicate the seed's germination preference.

When planting light-stimulated plants, don't bury the seeds. Just cover them lightly with peat moss, so they are able to get the light required to germinate.

Keep the lights as close to the tops of the plants as possible, preferably 1-2 inches. The light diffuses quickly as they get further away.

Watering: When first planting, it helps to pre-moisten your medium before placing your seeds, especially if you use peat moss, which initially repels water. I use a spray bottle, so as not to disturb the seeds too much. After that, water from the bottom, adding water to the tray holding the seed cells.

Your medium should be moist, never dry, but not so wet as to encourage mold or stem rot, also known as damping off. Add 1/4th inch of water in the tray when it is empty.

may lead to surface mold from trapped moisture if left in place too long. So be sure to check seed cells often, and remove the plastic as soon as the seedlings emerge so they get enough light.

Follow these simple steps, and you should get healthy, vigorous starts for your garden.

~Gordon Clark is a UVM Extension Master Gardener from Burlington, Vermont.

## Stay Connected while in Self Isolation

### Remote Volunteer Opportunities

### Volunteering

Schedule a Zoom meet-up with other volunteers, make it fun and social, share ideas and tips on gardening.

Contact Julie Marks about writing a short article for the next statewide volunteer newsletter ([jlmarks722@gmail.com](mailto:jlmarks722@gmail.com)).

Sign up for a gardening or composting webinar (resource list attached)

Work with a project leader to apply for a project grant

Offer to make plant tags or educational signs for a demo garden near you - view a [map or list of projects here](#) and contact the project leader to help

Do you have fundraising expertise? Please contact Cindy about helping with this year's EMG Conference to be held in November.

## Advance Your Gardening Knowledge

### Upcoming Events & Conferences





Save the Date  
for  
International Master Gardener Conference 2021

September 13 – 17, 2021  
Norfolk, VA – Hilton Norfolk The Main  
[internationalmastergardener.com](https://internationalmastergardener.com)

### Upcoming Free Webinars for Adults

**Dueling with Diggers: Gophers, Moles, Voles and Ground Squirrels.** Join Dr. Dana Sanchez for an introduction to digging critters you might encounter in your yard or garden. This presentation will increase your understanding of the biology of common digging pests including gophers, moles, voles, and ground squirrels. Dr. Sanchez will share management tips and there will be time for a Q&A. Apr 28, 2020, 1:00 PM EST

[https://uvmextension.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_jQmzYnKFQYiaE6qvVtosiw](https://uvmextension.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_jQmzYnKFQYiaE6qvVtosiw)

### Best Management Practices for Community Composting

This webinar is the second of a series on community-scale composting, focused on the nuts and bolts of community composting. Siting considerations, feedstock collection, choosing a system, determining site capacity, system management, and composting through the winter will be addressed. Registration is required. Questions? Contact Natasha Duarte, Composting Association of Vermont, [natasha@compostingvermont.org](mailto:natasha@compostingvermont.org)

**(March 31, 1:00-2:15pm)**

### 4-H Distance Learning Socials

Do you have kids? Are you looking for activity ideas but don't want too much screen time?  
Join 4-H for 15 minutes of content paired with a home activity or content.

[https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/4-H-and-Youth/events/Distance\\_Learning\\_Socials\\_1.pdf](https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/4-H-and-Youth/events/Distance_Learning_Socials_1.pdf)



Photo by Jane Bonham

## QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

Test Yourself

What is wrong with the plant in the photo above?

## ANSWER:

Winter Salt Damage!

Generally, road salt is mostly (98.5 percent) common sodium chloride with traces of other mineral salts. According to the Purdue Extension service, you “can minimize plant damage by irrigating soils to leach out the sodium and chloride prior to spring growth. Since most salts are water-soluble, thorough and repeated applications of water can effectively leach salts out of the root zones.” We attach a link to the Purdue publication:

The UMass Extension also agrees that leaching soils through heavy watering can help remove salts from well-drained soils. However, it does not work for soils with poor drainage. If you have poorly draining soil by the road, you can improve drainage by adding organic matter.

References:



[plants-how-to-reduce-plant-injury-from-winter-salt.  
https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/yard-garden/growing-turf-on-salt-affected-sites-7-227/](https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/yard-garden/growing-turf-on-salt-affected-sites-7-227/)

## Master Gardener Helpline Happenings!



Due to COVID-19, the Helpline Office is currently closed until April 15. However, several Master Gardener volunteers are answering emails from home. If you have questions, please give us a call and leave a message at @ 802-656-5421, and don't forget to refer others to the helpline.

## UPCOMING EVENTS!

Below you'll find a wide variety of Master Gardener and Composter events around Vermont. Click on the event to learn more and register.

#### Extension Master Gardener Events

Today	<b>Saturday, May 18</b>	<a href="#">Print</a> <a href="#">Week</a> <a href="#">Month</a> <a href="#">Agenda</a>
10:00am	NW Plant Sale	
10:00am	UVM Hort Farm Lilac Walk & Talk with Kitty Werner	
<b>Monday, May 20</b>		
6:00pm	Rutland Chapter Steering Committee Meeting	
<b>Saturday, June 1</b>		
9:00am	Central/NEK Plant Sale-Open to the public	
9:00am	Rutland Chapter Annual Plant Sale	
2:00pm	Rhododendron Walk and Talk	
<b>Tuesday, June 4</b>		
4:00pm	Williston-Hanging Basket Planting & Class	
<b>Saturday, June 8</b>		
5:00pm	25th Anniversary Celebration	
<b>Saturday, June 15</b>		

SUBMIT A MASTER  
GARDENER OR  
COMPOSTER EVENT

Submitting an event for the calendar? Events welcome from Certified Master Gardener & Composter Volunteers in Vermont locations. Subject to review. Sorry! We do not accept events from the General Public.

EMG STATE  
CONFERENCE  
OCTOBER 13, 2018

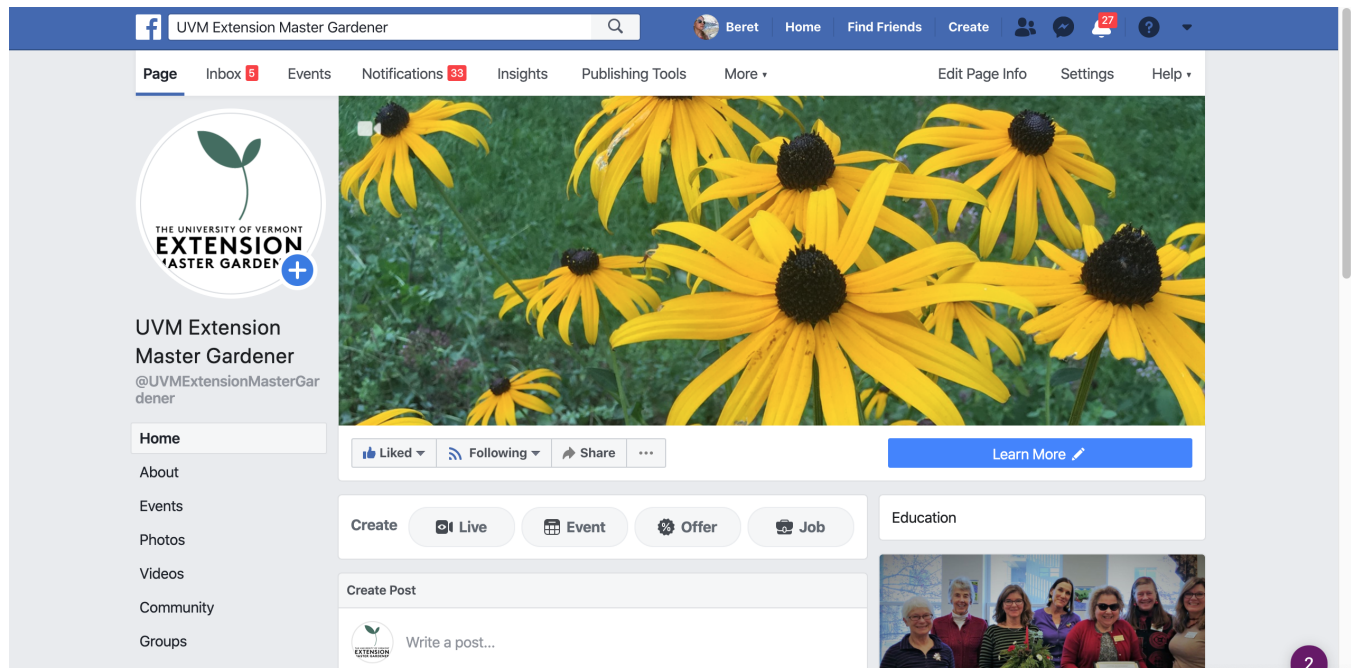
3

Find out what's happening in the Master Gardener & Composter World or Submit an Event to our Calendar. Recruit Master Gardeners and Interns to help with your project. Keep the EMG state network updated on what's happening in your region.

[Click here to Submit or View](#)

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Did you know we have a Facebook Page?



If you haven't yet, please visit and like our page.

<https://www.facebook.com/UVMExtensionMasterGardener/>

Support Us!  
Help us continue to Grow



The UVM Extension Master Gardener Program cultivates gardening communities through volunteer education and demonstration. Our volunteers work throughout the state to promote successful, safe, and environmentally prudent home horticulture practices. As a self-funded Extension program, we need your help to keep growing.

**Please make a donation today!**

[CLICK HERE TO DONATE](#)



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