

EMGs Win Awards and Well Deserved!

Mike Lizotte Wins Alumni Award

Dr. Mark Starrett

Mike Lizotte, EMG Class of 2010, has been selected to receive the Outstanding Alumni Award in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at The University of Vermont (UVM) for 2018. The award recognizes leadership and/or achievement in the Alumni's particular field, contributions to the community, as well as service to UVM. Mike was nominated for this award by Dr. Mark Starrett, Associate Professor of Horticulture at UVM, and received support through letters of recommendation from community groups and EMG Project Leaders.

Mike is the owner of American Meadows, located in Shelburne, Vt. American Meadows has been a generous donor to several EMG and community projects, as well as providing thousands of plants, bulbs, and seeds to the educational gardens at UVM. One of Mike's goals is to promote appropriate plant choices that help to enhance the environment by sustaining the native pollinators, as well as non-native honeybees. Mike has been working to develop a personalized series of seed packets that contain seeds of plants native to each region of the U.S. that are "pollinator-friendly" plants and are easy to grow. Mike is currently the Vice President of the Board of the Home Garden Seed Association and also is on the Board of Directors for the National Garden Bureau, which is made up of industry professionals in the field of horticulture.

Congratulations to Mike on this award!

Susan Adams Wins NW EMG of the Year



Trish Kargman

When Extension Master Gardener came up with the concept of having a project leader, how did they know that Susan Adams would fit the bill perfectly? She's determined, energetic, and goal oriented. She not only relies on her own horticultural competence but calls on the expertise of the other gardeners who work with her. She praises them frequently. Under her direction, the display gardens at the Deborah Rawson Library in Jericho have been renovated and the vegetable garden enlarged. Visitors are astounded when they walk outside and see how beautiful it is.

Every spring Susan visits the nearby elementary school and helps the children start flowers and vegetables from seed which they later plant in the library's garden. All the produce from the garden is donated to the local food shelf and another deserving organization. Susan is also known as "the cookie lady." All the gardeners who tend the plants with her love her and are so pleased she is getting this well deserved award.





Helen Prussian and Lisa Portelli at the Hartland Herb garden project

Photo by Cindy Heath

Master Gardening: Medicine for the Soul

Lisa Portelli

During the winter of 2017, I embarked on a healing gardening quest. All my life I wanted to take a Master Gardener course. It's all about timing. I live in Claremont, New Hampshire. When I researched the course offered by the University of New Hampshire, I found I would have to travel a great distance to complete the course. Then I thought to myself, "Wonder what's going on in Vermont?" I jumped on the Internet and discovered I could take an online course with the

University of Vermont. I got in touch with the University of New Hampshire farm extension in Newport, New Hampshire to see if I would be able to transfer EMG internship credit hours to the extension on completion of the course. The answer was yes!

On February 7, 2017 I commenced checking another item of my bucket list. I dug into the EMG course with fervor. As part of our training, we have to complete an internship of 40 hours of volunteer work at a project at an approved EMG

project site. I was thinking about types of projects. I wanted to work on a project focusing on medicinal herbs. Why you say? The answer is this: I happen to have Multiple Sclerosis and Bipolar Disorder. I'm also in recovery. I frequently look to herbs to aid in my health. I deal with a lot of physical and emotional pain on a regular basis. I've been a gardener all my life and have a powerful connection with nature and the seasons. I love to grow things and watch the cycles of life unfold—birth, death, rebirth. So, as I was looking at the Windsor chapter project list, my heart skipped a beat. Could it be? There before me was a listing for a project in Hartland, Vermont. It was the Hartland Library Herb Garden. I must confess, when I saw this, it filled me with such joy! My adrenaline kicked in. I couldn't believe it. It was everything I had hoped for. Made to order. I mean custom-made. I immediately contacted Extension Master Gardener (EMG), Helen Prussian, the project leader, to make arrangements to start working my internship.

On the day of our first meet-up at the project, I pulled into the parking lot and got my gardening tools out, then started approaching the herb garden. Something shifted inside of me. I was besieged by a bolt of energy and joy so swift, so sudden, it moved me to tears. I cannot explain the how of it, the why of it. This is just how it goes for me. It is something primal and so sacred. It is communion with plant life and all of nature. It is something I cannot contain. It is something of the heart.

Helen and I put our stuff down, and together we set foot inside the perimeter of the garden. Planting our feet firmly on the soil, we simultaneously inhaled. Then exhaled. Then gave each other a knowing look and promptly erupted into fits of giggles. We then commenced to put our heads together for a little planning session. We had work to do!! There's something about getting down on your knees and making that first contact with Earth after a long winter's sleep. Touching, holding the earth. Inhaling the rich, loamy aroma laced with whispers of lavender, lemon balm, basil and the like. Plunging your hands and forearms into the soil—it's such an incredible feeling. Like scratching a good itch or slugging down a large class of Southern iced tea on a 101° day. Just heaven. And good for everything.

I mean what I say when I say good for everything. Gardening has always given me both physical and emotional relief. My MS is the relapsing-remitting form. I never know what is going to hit me. Basically, it comes out of nowhere. At times, the physical pain is excruciating and maddening. I suffer a great deal of spasticity and chronic fatigue. When my bipolar is triggered, I have to grapple with acute anger and floods of unhealthy emotions. Sometimes I feel out of control. It is just as unpredictable as the MS. I am at war with myself. The Centers for Disease Control and prevention confirm for me what I already know: gardening is healing and promotes good health. An article published by the Michigan

State University extension¹ entitled "What are the physical and mental benefits of gardening?" go into greater depth about these manifold benefits. Nature induces tranquility and healing. Gardening offers clarity of mind and a sense of reward. According to the CDC, moderate intensity level activity for 2.5 hours per week can reduce the risk for Obesity, High Blood Pressure, Type II Diabetes, Osteoporosis, Heart Disease, Stroke, Depression, Colon Cancer and Premature Death. Gardening can achieve that goal. There are many ways in which gardening enhances mind and body. Here are just a few: reduces stress by helping you relax, improves flexibility, balance and sensory perception, boosts feel-good hormones, and cultivates a healthier heart.

The healing began as soon as Helen and I started edging the perimeter of the bed. It was as if a safe place was being created for me. It was like a balm. Digging into the packed ground started waking up my entire body. My adrenaline started kicking in. Helen and I started tearing out dead leaves and trimmed back the plants. Even when decayed, the herbs give off their intoxicating scents. Believe me, they are hard to resist! You can find your way around the garden by smell. Mmmmmmm...

Once the debris was cleared away, we could see what we had to work with. I felt such a sense of accomplishment. I suffer many health limitations, so being able to complete each task successfully started patching up my tattered self-esteem. All the while working, I slay the demons in my mind. It is a victorious feeling! I paced myself. I know my limits. Slow and steady, I worked my way through the garden. Digging, arranging, planting. Sylvia Newberry gave a presentation at the project, and she said something about gardening that really resonated for me. She said: make it your own. And that's exactly what we did. In the end of the season, we had rearranged and planted a total of 40 herbs.

In the fall, when it came time to put the bed to sleep, I felt a sadness that I wouldn't be able to go out on a regular basis and work. But is it really work? Absolutely not. It's a total joy. Whenever I'm out on I-91 and pass by the Hartland exit, I feel a deep yearning. I miss it terribly. A piece of my heart is at the Hartland Library Herb Garden project. I am forever changed for good.

I believe Rachel Carson summarizes best what is sometimes so difficult for me to articulate when I am full of emotion. "Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature, the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter."

1 "What are the physical and mental benefits of gardening?", Julia Darnton & Lauren McGuire, Michigan State University Extension, May 19, 2014. http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/what_are_the_physical_and_mental_benefits_of_gardening



Donna Covais (behind podium) leads a session with EMG Mary Ann Wolf (standing) in support

Grand Way Horticultural Therapy Project

Robilee Smith

Tucked away in busy South Burlington is a secret garden and a wonderful EMG project that uses horticultural therapy to help local seniors with dementia. The EMG team also grows organic vegetables and herbs on-site for their clients' lunches at the VNA's "Grand Way Adult Day Care" facility.

On Wednesday mornings, every two weeks or so, a team of Vermont EMGs come together under Project Lead Donna Covais's guidance to help 22 seniors in the "Adult Day Care" program create seasonal flower arrangements to take home to their care givers. The project runs year-round, so the team helps clients create Thanksgiving horns of plenty, Holiday wreaths, Valentine's Day bouquets and Easter basket arrangements while other Vermont gardeners are dreaming of warmer days and gardens.

During the gardening season, the EMG team also fills raised beds with seedlings for summer beauty and healthy food. The VNA facility includes a garden that is accessible to the clients that keeps them safely in an enclosed/fenced/locked area. Clients come out into the garden to help collect lunch ingredients, sample herbs and cherry tomatoes and to simply enjoy the beauty of the gardens. For EMGs who can't get away from work on Wednesday mornings, there's garden

weeding and watering work to be done on weekends during the summer months as well.

I joined the team after caring for my mother through her end-of-life in our home. Mom went the distance with Alzheimer's and I have learned that you get a lot more than you give when you slow down and enjoy the moment with someone who is living in the moment (whichever moment that might be!). The VNA staff teams up with us and I leave each session with renewed warmth in my heart—largely from the love the clients share so readily, but also, from the laughter we've all enjoyed, the gratitude of the VNA staff and the friendship of peer EMGs who share their gardening expertise readily. It doesn't hurt to have spent a morning working with beautiful flowers!

Finally: for anyone considering joining the team: Donna Covais makes her "EMG Angels" job easy: she's a certified Horticultural Therapist and a former flower shop owner. She organizes everything—from the flower and supply purchases to the project steps. Donna leads each session with information and questions, per the theme of the day, to help stimulate clients' memories, motor skills and socialization.

It's a joy learning horticultural therapy from Donna!



Back Row, Left to Right: Charlie Nardoizzi, Donna Covais, Donna's husband Joe Covais, EMGs: Robilee Smith, Wendy Savoie & Jill Mitchell. Front Row, Left to Right: EMG Program Coordinator Beret Halvorson, EMGs: Mary Ann Wolf & Sue Brown

American Horticultural Therapy Association Holds Meeting in Vermont!

EMG Donna Covais (Project Lead for the Grand Way Horticultural Therapy Program) invited the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) to hold their annual national conference in Vermont. After an exploratory visit

in 2016, Burlington was selected to host the event. Donna and Charlie Nardoizzi shared a keynote presentation hour and the Grand Way EMG team ("EMG Angels" as Donna refers to them) were in support.

A Fall centerpiece creation



EMG Robilee Smith gives a client a choice of flowers with a VNA team member in support





Gardening With Bea

Bea Cole

Dear Bea:

In the fall, we really enjoy our Black-eyed Susans. They add so much late season color to our gardens. However, I've noticed that they are never in the same place year after year. We always have a lot of them but often have to transplant seedlings in order to bring them back to the place we want them. I understand they are also called Rudbeckia and I was just wondering if this is a common occurrence with this plant. We have friends that claim that their Black-eyed Susan stays in the same place year after year.

— Will

Dear Will:

Black-eyed Susan is a member of the Rudbeckia genus and there are about 20 species of annuals, biennials and perennials in this plant classification. Rudbeckia *hirta* is the species that you are most likely referring to and some of these Black-eyed Susans are a biennial wildflower. The seedlings mature and flower one year, dropping seeds for next year's plants. They are prolific seeders but should be allowed to do that in order to continue the species in your garden.

Another plant referred to as a Black-eyed Susan is the Rudbeckia *fulgida* 'Goldsturm' which is a perennial. This cultivar is a long blooming, resilient plant this is used a lot in landscapes and is probably what your friends have. One of the nice things about this plant is that it has been bred to resist powdery mildew and does not need to be staked. However, it can grow into a rather large clump.

There are many species of Rudbeckia that are attractive but some are short-lived perennials and will only last for a couple of years before they disappear from your garden. The genus includes plants that go from two feet tall to over six feet tall so if buying one read the plant label to be sure the plant will fit into your landscape. The *R. laciniata* var. *hortensia* or 'Golden Glow' is a double yellow variety that has been around in Vermont for decades. The six foot tall plant does need to be staked but provides brilliant color until frost.

Gardening Tip: It's not too late to start seeds indoor for a variety of vegetables and annuals. Check the seed packet for germination rates and transplant dates.

Bea Cole is a certified UVM Extension Master Gardener volunteer. Email questions to Flowerpower.buzz@gmail.com



Spring Comes to the Northeast Kingdom

Pam Kennedy

It may be cold, with ice and snow, but Spring made an appearance on Saturday when the Community Seed Exchange at the Barton Public Library opened its doors for the 2018 gardening season. A UVM Extension Master Gardener Project, the Community Seed Exchange is beginning its third year in the Northeast Kingdom. Extension Master Gardener Pam Kennedy is a life-long gardener who completed the EMG course in 2013. When she retired, two years later, she felt the time had come to find a project that fit her interest in sustainable agriculture. Although not a seed saver Pam became interested in seed libraries through reading about some that existed throughout the country. Pam mentioned it to Toni Eubanks, the librarian at the Barton Public Library who responded, "I've been thinking about that too!" The seed was planted and when the Library Trustees agreed that it met the library's mission the CSE, then called the Orleans County Seed Library, was created.

Saturday morning, February 24th, the downstairs of the Barton Public Library was busy with talk of growing, green and gardens. Members of the Community Seed Exchange (CSE) were there to talk with prospective members about starting and saving seeds, planning a garden and many other topics. Interested participants also had a chance to talk about topics from beekeeping and pollinator gardens to restoring old apple trees and grafting. Students from Sterling College provided working hands as they sorted and labeled seeds for the CSE. There are a variety of seeds to choose from including generous donations from High Mowing Seeds and

other seed companies as well as seeds that are donated by local seed savers. The Community Seed Exchange is a free and public service of the Barton Public Library. Interested gardeners do not need to be residents of Orleans County or members of the library. They are invited to come any time the Barton Library is open to sign up and check out free seeds. The membership in the CSE has grown each year and other libraries have expressed interest in having seeds available at their sites. Plans are in the works for these "Seedlings" to be at other sites, complete with sign-up information and seeds to check out. One will also be placed at the Old Stone House. For more information you can reach the CSE at nekseeds@gmail.com.



Pam Kennedy, EMG, shows Cindy Boyle, 2018 intern, where to go for more information at the Barton Seed Exchange.



Benefits and Wellness Fair

Karen Patno

On a snowy, Wednesday, February 7, 2018, with many schools in the area closed, Karen Patno, Leslie Carew, and Vikki Gauvin participated in the half-day Benefits and Wellness Fair at Champlain College promoting the Master Gardener, Master Composter programs, and gardening as a wonderful wellness benefit. The fair was open to all faculty and staff of the College totaling over 200 people. Amazingly enough, the faculty and staff turned out, some with their kiddos in tow! Besides literature on the programs, we engaged people with a game, created by Leslie, of "Do you know your birth month flower." For each month she printed out the flower and we asked people walking by if they knew their birth month flower. That was news to most people. We then showed them the picture to see if they knew what

their flower was. As a prize for being correct, we gave out American Meadow Wildflower seed packets with 'Commit random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty' on the packet. After playing, we had conversations about gardening, the programs offered, and answered their many questions. For us, as Master Gardeners, and for the faculty and staff, it was a wonderful chance to put ourselves in the springtime talking about when to start seeds indoors, what to plant and when it was safe to put them in the garden. The other benefit for all was a chance to talk about their gardens, tell us what successes they've had, or problems we could help them with, and watch them leave with the happy smile of what is yet to come, spring and summer.

Below: Leslie Carew with Freddie and Irene





Lisa interviews Judy Mirro, Helpline Volunteer

How long have you been volunteering at the helpline?

I've been volunteering on the helpline since 2009. My first two years were spent answering the phones but after that it's been helping with our email inquiries year round.



What do you find most rewarding about volunteering at the helpline?

Sharing the knowledge to ease the frustration of other enthusiasts—when I can successfully answer their concern. And the camaraderie I share with other helpline volunteers. It just makes me happy.

What do you find most challenging about volunteering at the helpline?

For me it's a logistics thing. I live over an hour away from UVM which makes it difficult to participate in all the helpline learning activities. That's how much I appreciate the trainings and updates that are provided to us.

Do you have a funny/odd/interesting story to share about a call you received from a client?

I wouldn't know where to start! But the latest one came from a woman seeking advice about getting her dog to stop eating rabbit 'poop'—all due to a high influx of rabbits invading her garden. She went on about her dogs dental problems and ailments, but all she really required was a good fence. And what was wrong with her dog anyway? Most dogs chase rabbits! I wasn't sure who was sillier after this inquiry, the dog or the owner.

What home horticulture topic do you consider yourself to be a specialist in?

I'm still learning, but along with the annuals, perennials, vegetables, berries, fruit trees... I have amassed a rather large selection of house plants. My years of working in greenhouses during my teens through twenties has really helped me gain confidence in answering all types of house plant questions.

My personal plant collection fluctuates, but at times I carry over 100 plants between my office and home. Right now the count stands at 76.

When you were younger, who inspired you the most regarding interests in gardening?

As far back as I can remember I was in the vegetable garden snitching carrots from my carrot patch and helping my Noni tend the grapes. I loved being in the garden, anybody's garden!

I wrote a family recipe cookbook and in part of the dedication I wrote: "To Pop, Noni, Great Aunt Josephina, and Mrs. Heger for sharing their passion and love of gardening."

But I was inspired to volunteer on the helpline when I was 9 years old and my little twig of a Mulberry tree had grown a little too large for our back yard and we needed advice to successfully transplant it over to the local school. My Pop pushed me to ask the questions to the helpline extension office volunteer and I was so impressed by the gentleman's knowledge, patience and willingness to assist. When I hung up the phone I looked at my Pop and declared, one day, I'd like to be like the man on the phone, helping people with their gardening questions!



Gardening in an era of climate change

Judith Irven: Vermont Certified Horticulturist

Outdoor Spaces Landscape Designs

As I look back on last summer, both here in Vermont and all down the eastern seaboard, I recall it as incredibly dry and also very hot—not an easy time for our gardens.

And a quick check of the NOAA website for Burlington reinforced my impressions. The overall rainfall in the summer of 2016 was 50% below the long-term average. A total of 15 inches of rain fell between May and October, compared with the long-term average of 22 inches, and every month was drier than the long-term norm.

Also, during those same six months, the average daily maximum temperatures were all several degrees higher than their long-term counterparts.

By contrast, so far in 2017 we have experienced excessively high rainfall. 2011 was also a year with excessively high rainfall, so much so that Vermont was declared a federal disaster area because of the loss of spring crops. And of course, everybody remembers that same year the devastation caused by Tropical Storm Irene.

In an era of climate change, wide swings in the weather patterns are becoming the ‘new normal’—some years are unduly dry while others very wet. And at the same time we are also experiencing more extreme *individual* weather events—from high winds, to flooding and record snowfalls.

Climate change and the gardener

The message is clear: we should be aiming to design resilient gardens that will thrive both in times of drought and when there is excessive rain.

Last fall I had a wonderful opportunity to spend a couple of hours, along with friends at American Meadows in Shelburne, Vermont, talking with David Salman of High Country Gardens and a recognized expert on gardening in an era of climate change.

David comes from New Mexico where he has been following changing weather patterns and their impact on plants. As he explained, the last five years the entire Southwest has been in the grips of an excessive drought. But, by contrast, the 1980s decade in New Mexico was one of wettest on record.

So I was particularly eager to see what advice David could pass along to help us prepare Vermont gardens for the next drought that—despite this year’s chilly wet spring—will surely return in a year or two, as well as for the next deluge.

Here are his suggestions to improve drought tolerance:

Smart gardening practices conserve water

Firstly, ensure the soil profile of any bed is flat, rather than mounded—especially at the edges. This helps the water penetrate the soil, rather than running onto the surrounding hardscape or lawn. And, if the soil is already mounded, you

can add a low stone wall around the perimeter of the bed to achieve the desired profile.

Also, with new designs, orient the beds with the long sides facing approximately east and west, as long south-facing beds tend to get parched in the mid-day sun.

Now look for places where water naturally collects, such as below the roof or near a solid driveway. Instead of letting this water run off into the storm sewer, create a 'rain-garden'. This is essentially a gently sloped sunken bed that holds, and then gradually absorbs the excess water which then irrigates the surrounding plants. UVM's Vermont Rain Garden Manual (<https://www.uvm.edu/seagrant/vtraingardenmanual>) is an excellent resource that covers both the design and plant selection for rain gardens.

And lastly, water your mature plants less frequently—once a week or even once a fortnight should be plenty for established plants. But when you do water, be sure to give each plant a thorough soaking (the equivalent of at least a 1/2 inch of rainfall). This encourages plants to develop deeper roots and thus need less water in the long run.

Soil enrichment creates drought-tolerant plants

For hundreds of years gardeners everywhere have known the value of enriching their soil with compost. This magic ingredient creates a water-retentive soil with valuable micro-nutrients.

Mycorrhizae—specialized fungi that live in an intimate symbiotic relationship with the roots of most plants—are the second critical component of healthy soil. Some types of mycorrhizal fungi surround the roots while other actually penetrate the cells of the host plant. But either way, the plant supplies the fungi with all their food—in the form of carbohydrates—and in return the fungi help the host plant absorb both water and nutrients from the soil while also protecting it from various pathogens. Thus, in addition to adding compost to the soil, it is often recommended that mycorrhizal soil additives will enhance the ability of plants to survive prolonged dry spells.

However, both Ann Hazelrigg and Mark Starrett of UVM agree that, while mycorrhizal fungi contribute to overall plant health, there is no definitive research to demonstrate that applying mycorrhizal soil additives will improve plant survival.

Check for microclimates

Even in a dry summer, there may be areas of the property that are wetter than the rest, so use these to your advantage.

For instance, since water runs downhill, low lying areas remain wet longer after it rains, making them suitable for many drought-tolerant plants that can endure periods intermittent dryness. The pin oak and swamp white oak are both considered drought-tolerant.

However, in very dry places, such as on a south or west facing slope, which will get baked in the afternoon sun, choose plants (like the bur oak) which are classified as *xeric*.

Winter advice

We are all aware that winters today are warmer than in the past, meaning the soil does not freeze as deeply. This makes it feasible to experiment with interesting perennials that may be rated as less hardy.

However, despite the trend towards for higher *average* winter temperatures, once in a while frigid Arctic air escapes from the polar regions, resulting in short bursts of intensely cold air. While these short cold spells will not lower the ground temperatures significantly, they may damage less-hardy woody plants above the ground. So be more conservative when using less hardy *woody* plants.

And lastly, when the drought extends into the winter, plants actually succumb to drought rather than cold. So be sure to thoroughly irrigate any vulnerable plants—such as those you planted the previous fall—both before they enter dormancy in the late fall and again if the temperature rises above 50° during the winter, when the roots can absorb it best.

And finally—some well-known hardy perennials that also tolerate dry times

As we anticipate the prospect of more dry summers somewhere in our future, I suggest we begin to populate our gardens now with drought-tolerant plants which will also thrive in the intervening wet years. (so—no I am not suggesting we all run out and buy cacti!)

A quick Internet search yields plenty of suggestions. Here is David's list of perennials for you to ponder:

Anise hyssop; *Allium* 'Millenium'; Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*); Poppy Mallow (*Callirhoe involucrata*); Tickseed (*Coreopsis* 'Zagreb'); Dianthus 'Firewitch'; Seed grown varieties of Echinacea; Sea Holly; Gaillardia; Dead-nettles (*Lamium* and *Lamiastrum galeobdonblon* 'Herman's Pride'); Rough Blazing star (*Liatris aspera*); Heirloom honeysuckle (*Lonicera reticulata* Kintzley's Ghost); Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*); All varieties of Catmint; Evening primrose (*Oenothera macrocarpa*); Ornamental oreganos; Ornamental grasses (except Muhlenbergia and Molina); Russian Sage; Black eyed Susans; Meadow Sage (*Salvia* 'Blue Hill', 'May Night' and 'Caradonna'); Soapwort (*Saponaria ocymoides*); Both tall and groundcover types of Sedum; Goldenrod cultivars (*Solidago*); Yarrow.

Judith Irvén and her husband Dick Conrad live in Goshen where together they nurture a large garden. Judith is a landscape designer and Vermont Certified Horticulturist. She also teaches Sustainable Home Landscaping for the Vermont Master Gardener program. She writes about her Vermont gardening life at www.northcountryreflections.com.

Dick is a landscape and garden photographer; you can see his photographs at The Brandon Artists Guild and at www.northcountryimpressions.com.

You can reach Judith at judithirven@gmail.com



Chad at Burlington Farmers Market with flowers from his farm.

Photos by Karen Patno

Tips and Tricks for setting up tables for EMG Events

Karen Patno

Consider the overarching goal for the EMG program:

UVM Extension Master Gardener cultivates gardening communities through volunteer education and demonstration.

Consider inviting a master composter to work with you.

With this in mind, here are some tips to make the table inviting and to engage people at the event:

- ✿ Consider the season the event is in and use props to draw people's attention to the table.
 - ✿ Use seasonal tablecloths—vinyl ones in seasonal prints can be purchased, or colorful ones you may have at home
 - Tip: Many Chapters have some money to purchase items like a \$3 table cloth
 - ✿ Flowers and plants add a colorful touch, some ideas are-
 - Cut flowers from your garden in mason jars
 - Plants from your home or deck
 - Seedlings you have started
 - Buy a plant to raffle, see if your chapter will donate money for this
- ✿ Set-up the table and add additional props, some ideas are:
 - ✿ Personal favorite gardening books, magazines and seed catalogs—display in a decorative crate/box, or gardening gathering container from your home for people to look through and resource for answering questions, sparking ideas and conversation.
 - Tip: Resource books from the EMG office, for example, the *Landscape Plants for Vermont* with the brochure for people to purchase.
 - ✿ Peat pots with a trowel and gardening gloves draped over them as decoration.
 - ✿ Use clear stand-up frames to put a colorful Ask A Master Gardener! and Garden Questions Answered Here as many people stand there, look at the sign and say I have

a garden question but can't think of it and that opens the opportunity to ask them about their garden and to give them the email/helpline number to ask their question if it doesn't come to them.

- ✦ The office has helpline magnets and other information to hand out. They can be picked up at the office or mailed to you. Contact Lisa at master.gardener@uvm.edu
 - Tip: If you can't get the magnets fast enough, type up and print on business card stock or plain paper and cut up. If you need a template, email [karen.patno@gmail](mailto:karen.patno@gmail.com) and I'll send you mine.
- ✦ Postcard in a stand with the above information that people can snap a picture of with their phone
 - Tip: the EMG office at UVM has small tree trunks with a slit cut in it for this.
- ✦ Display stands with the EMG class and Master Composter class information
 - Tip: the EMG office has clear stands you can borrow for one-time events
- ✦ Colorful banner to let people know who you are and where the program is based.
 - Tip: See if your chapter has money to make one to share—they are under \$30.
- ✦ Laptop/tablet/cell phone to help find information and answers to their questions or to show them the master gardener website and resources available.
 - Tip: If no laptop/tablet/cell phone or wifi available, have preprinted Informational Request paper on a clip board with name, email address, phone number and what to send as follow-up information such emailing them a fact sheet or sending a question to the EMG 'submit your question—email'
 - Tip: email Karen.patno@gmail.com and I can send you my template for the Informational Sheet I've used.
- ✦ Stand out in front of the table or to the side of the table.
 - Tip: Engage the person walking by with a smile, hello and ask them to play your game or watch your demo.
- ✦ To draw people in, come up with a game, demo or raffle to bring people in to a conversation—some examples are—
 - ✦ Seed potting demo
 - Tip: do several demos if working a several hour event

✦ Composting demo

- Tip: Advertise the time of the demo on a white board so people can check back and let the event organizer know you are doing it and the time
- ✦ Plant a garden pot with flowers and herbs
 - Tip: think thrill, spill and fill when creating
- ✦ Make up index cards with alphabet letters and ask people to pick one from the "deck" and tell you what is their favorite flower, vegetable or herb that begins with the letter—be ready with some ideas to help.
 - Tip: To make the deck reusable, cover cards with clear contact paper
- ✦ Birth month flowers: have the birth month flowers printed on paper and ask people their birth month and ask them if they know their birth month flower—if no, show them the flower and ask them if they know what it is.
 - Tip: Print a key card to go with the set as many flowers can look similar
- ✦ Have index cards with sentence starters and ask people to choose one and for them to complete the sentence —examples are:
 - I am new/never/experienced/expert at ____
 - I have never ____
 - I love it when ____
 - I garden/don't garden but ____
 - When I think of flowers, I think of ____
 - My favorite vegetable is ____
 - The best season is ____
 - My favorite garden store is ____
 - Tip: be prepared with your own answer to start the conversation
- ✦ Have some garden objects in a reusable bag and have people pick one out and tell you what they would use it for.

Bottom line is make it colorful, happy and fun. People will remember connecting with you and the Master Gardener program.

Below: at the Wellness Fair





NEKWMD Assists LEARN, Inc. in Creating On-Site Composting System

NEKWMD Outreach Coordinator, Marcus Berry, and LEARN, Inc. students create compost bin using pallets.

In May 2017, the students of LEARN, Inc. of Lyndonville were excited to collaborate with Shannon Choquette, the NEKWMD's ECO AmeriCorps member and Master Composter intern, to learn about the science of creating compost and why composting is a sustainable solution for a few of the environmental challenges we face here in Vermont.

Shannon reflected, "I wanted to make sure the students understood the connection between our waste management choices, including composting, and our impacts on the environment. We live in a very rural area, so we discussed

some common agricultural challenges, such as soil erosion and nutrient management, to emphasize that properly-made compost can be one part of a sustainable solution to promote moisture retention and overall soil health."

The students quickly recognized that food waste is a problem we all contribute to, and therefore we can all be a part of the solution. The students, who vary between grades 9-12, chose to create a 3-bin composting system, pictured below, to effectively compost all their non-meat and dairy food waste to create a soil amendment for the on-campus gardens.



UVM Extension Master Gardener, John Joseph Wurst, teamed up with the Weybridge Energy Committee for a new event for the Weybridge Green-up Day last year. Weybridge residents learned about composting food waste when they stopped by for coffee and pastry from 8:30 AM to 10:30 AM on the Weybridge center lawn. Residents came by before or after Greening Up, or on their way to recycling. There were composting examples and ideas, a raffle for a soil saver donated by the Addison County Regional Waste District, and experienced composters and UVM Master Gardeners on hand to answer questions. The event helped residents who are looking to start a composting system or want to improve the system they already have.

Sponsored by the Weybridge Energy Committee, the composting event helped residents learn how to successfully separate food waste from trash in an effort to reduce methane gas from landfills and to reduce overall trash in our waste stream.

In 2012, the Vermont Legislature unanimously passed Act 148, a universal recycling and composting law that offers Vermonters a new set of systems and tools for keeping as much as possible out of the landfill. Weybridge residents learned more about the progression of ACT 148 and how they can help by composting at home. As of July 1, 2017, facilities that offer services for managing trash (licensed transfer stations, drop-off centers, etc.) must also accept food residuals.



What Kind of Corn is Best for the Home Garden?

Daryle Thomas EMG '94

Why would you ever grow sweet corn in your home garden? Truth be known, you shouldn't. It takes up a great deal of space and exhausts too many soil nutrients. You already know where the farmer's market folks are who grow the best sweet corn in the area every season, at typically fifty cents an ear. For the most part, only a single ear grows on a single corn stalk, which is why it's not home garden material. Home garden space can be better justified for crops that produce more food for the space taken.

There is, however, a type of corn that may be grown by the home gardener. *Zea mays everta*. Not a sweet corn. Or a dent corn. Or a white-capped flint corn. Or a decorative rainbow corn to hang on the front door every fall. The late Orville Redenbacher made it famous, but you can grow a far better product right at home. Popcorn! Many of you have seen my Facebook photo. It looks like I'm sitting in a corn field. I'm actually sitting on the edge of a two foot by two-foot planter in front of nine stalks of popcorn. Most horticulturists would tell you that such close quarter growing can't be done but I've been able to do this on a small scale using my own fertilizer mix.

I made my own blend of liquid fertilizer from OMRI-listed sources, which I added in small amounts to the daily waterings. Nine corn stalks, in a too small growing area, require plenty of water and fertilizer.

Popcorn is not hard to grow, but there are a couple of points to remember. Corn is wind pollinated. The tassels at the top of the corn stalk are male. The silks peeking from the ears are female. Popcorn must be pollinated to produce kernels. This is one reason why popcorn should be planted in blocks rather than rows. The stalks are usually taller than sweet corn, so I tie strings gently around bunches of stalks to keep the wind from knocking them over. Popcorn must be isolated from all other types of corn by at least 100 feet, preferably more, or the cross-pollinated kernels produced might not pop.

Popcorn matures in three to four months. The stalks should turn khaki brown and rattle in the wind when mature. Harvest the ears and store them under cover, but open to the drying breezes. Commercially, popcorn is harvested at 16% to 20% moisture, and allowed to dry down to 14%. The home grower is at a disadvantage here. Moisture measuring equipment for home use is not common. Keep the drying ears away from an area heated above room temperature. If they get too dry, the kernels may not pop. Fussy.

Storing the dry kernels in Mason jars will keep them stable. They may be kept on the ear or twisted off. Your favorite glove merchant sells gloves that are dipped in a somewhat rough coating, usually blue. Buy a pair that you can just barely get on, maybe a size smaller than you would normally

wear. Grab an ear in both hands and rotate your hands back and forth to loosen the kernels. Even if you have only a few ears to pluck clean, having a friend to chat with makes the job go easier.

The nice thing is you can pop the kernels as soon as they come off an ear. There are many devices that pop corn. That Amish catalog in Kidron, OH sells the popper that stirs the kernels via turning a crank in the handle. Alton Brown, the *Good Eats* chef who trained at NECI in Vermont, says to use a 12-inch, 18/10 stainless bowl, like the one under the counter in your kitchen. Put three tablespoons of a neutral oil in the bottom. Add a quarter cup of kernels. Cover with tin foil in which you have punched a few vent holes. Using pot holders, put the bowl over medium heat, and keep it moving. When the popping begins to slow down, about three seconds apart, turn off the heat. Keep the bowl moving over the burner until the pops are five seconds apart, then remove your popper from the stove. Immediately lift the edge of the foil up to release any steam that may have accumulated.

Salt or no salt? Butter or no butter? Italian herbs or not? Choosing butter or herbs is up to you. I must have salt, to maintain my blood pressure. I still have some *Flavacol*, the magic stuff I used commercially when I was a corn-popping pro. It's not as bad as it looks! The orange color is from anatoto, a seed from a tree fruit native to Mexico and points south. The butter flavor is quite safe, as well. Flavacol is available from Amazon and comes in what looks like those old-fashioned, waxed, quart milk containers. I have very old Flavacol that is still delicious!

Make your own popcorn salt! Put a cup of your regular home salt in a food processor. Pulse several times until the salt is ground quite fine. Remember, pulse. This fine salt will bring out the flavor of your popcorn by sticking to the popped kernels better, and you use less salt overall.

Try growing some popcorn this year. You will find popcorn varieties in almost any seed catalog. Popcorn does not need a lot of space in the garden. The return on the space it does occupy is much higher than sweet corn, as a typical stalk grows two to five ears. It is very easy to grow, just keep the plants well watered, using a touch of fertilizer. After the harvest, keep most of the popcorn for your own use, but it's good to give a modest amount away. One thing is certain, you will never buy grocery store popcorn again.

Information in this article is based on my personal gardening experiences growing popcorn under less than ideal circumstances.

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Daryle Thomas is a volunteer with the UVM EMG program.

"How much does pirate corn cost?"

"A buck-an-ear!"