



## From the Bedford VCE Master Gardener HELP DESK

November 2013

*A monthly newsletter column for Bedford Extension Master Gardeners.  
Now available at the BAMGA website for interested gardeners, like you!*

*Editor: Linda E*

As the growing season winds down, November can be a time of reflection about what went right in your garden or landscape, what went wrong that could be improved upon, and what you never ever want to do again. If you haven't already done so, making notes on it now while it is still fresh in your mind should prove helpful next year. This list could also include a 'gee, I really would like a ...' list in case anybody asks in advance of the upcoming holiday season(s).

There are, of course, landscape maintenance / gardening tasks still to be accomplished. Established cool-season (species) lawns can still benefit from application of slow release nitrogen at the rate of one pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet of lawn. Remove leaves that have fallen on the lawn and use either as compost or mulch. And finally, continue mowing the lawn as needed. [1]

For vegetable gardens there is a whole host of chores remaining, depending on whether you are growing fall crops or (like some gardeners at this point) have had enough and just want to put the garden to bed. Either way, sooner or later the soil will need to be prepared for winter and all the equipment should be cleaned and stored. For detailed information please read "Fall Vegetable Gardening", VCE Pubs #426-334. [2]

For flower gardens and especially those with native plants, I was reminded recently that there might be a bit more leeway in what and how the garden beds are taken care of during the winter months. [3] Spent annuals, and diseased and / or pest infested perennials and leaf litter should be removed and destroyed. If those issues are not a problem, instead of cutting down all the dead flower stalks, seed heads, and/or cleaning up all the leaf-litter consider this: Is it really necessary to have a neat and tidy looking flower garden over winter? We should remember dead perennial stalks and leaves can provide food and shelter to not only a whole host of beneficial or predatory insects or their eggs (e.g., lady beetles or praying mantis egg sacks), but also pollinators or their eggs, larvae, cocoons, or pupae (e.g., butterflies or moths). Fallen leaves can provide protection to skinks, lizards, and toads, all helpful in keeping unwanted insects under control. [4] In addition, leaving the dead flower stalks over winter also provides snow and cold weather protection to the crowns of plants that will re-emerge next spring (e.g., Chrysanthemums). And finally, brush or twig piles can provide shelter to birds, while plant seed heads and berries can provide food.

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On to the Help Desk questions we go. Starting in November Help Desk calls are covered from volunteers' homes because we get very few calls. However, a few years ago the following question did come into the VCE Office MG Help Desk in November. Do you know the answer? If not, continue reading for the answers elsewhere in the Newsletter. And if you are really curious, please consider volunteering for the Help Desk in 2014; it is a good place to continue your learning!

### QUESTION: Voles!

A client contacted the Help Desk wanting to know whether there are any shrubs that voles do not eat.



### ANSWER:

Unfortunately, the Master Gardener volunteer who took the call could not find any shrubs that voles would not bother. The best thing to do is to remove the covering habitat - weeds, dense ground cover, brush, low spreading evergreens, and thick mulch. [5] When renovating or planting new gardens, shrubs, or trees, place 1/4 inch mesh galvanized hardware cloth 3 - 6" below surface to 18" above, and allow room for growth. Also, consider using rock or gravel instead of mulching. Other alternatives include trapping, but only if the vole population is small, and encouraging your neighborhood cats to hunt the voles.

<http://en.wikipedia.org>

### REFERENCES:

- [1] "Environmental Lawn Care Calendar"; S. Baker; Bedford VCE
- [2] "Fall Vegetable Gardening" <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-334/426-334.html>
- [3] Private conversation with Master Gardener Kathy S., October 17, 2013
- [4] "Beneficials In The Garden – Skink Lizard" [http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/beneficials/beneficial-18\\_lizard\\_garden\\_skinks.htm](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/beneficials/beneficial-18_lizard_garden_skinks.htm) , accessed 10/21/2013
- [5] "Voles" <http://icwdm.org/handbook/rodents/Voles.asp> , accessed 10/18/2013.

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The answers provided herein were based on specific situations and growing conditions. These recommendations may or may not be appropriate for all circumstances. For specific recommendations for your particular situation please contact your local Cooperative Extension Office.

Bedford County Extension Office: (540) 586-7675 / Email: Help Desk @ [BedfordMG@vt.edu](mailto:BedfordMG@vt.edu)

Websites: [www.BedfordAreaMasterGardeners.org](http://www.BedfordAreaMasterGardeners.org) and <http://offices.ext.vt.edu/bedford/>



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