

# October 2019-Vol.5 No.10



# Table of Contents

**Figgety-Doo-Dah** ..... 1  
**October in the Vegetable Garden** ..... 7  
**Plenty of Ways to Kill a Tree** ..... 11  
**Viburnum-A Shrub for Many Settings** ..... 16  
**Upcoming Events** ..... 29  
**The Ornamental Garden in October** ..... 32  
**Fig & Goat Cheese Appetizer** ..... 36

# Figgety-Doo-Dah

By mking | October 2019-Vol.5 No.10





As you may have guessed, this article celebrates the noble fig. Thanks to my Italian roots, I was introduced to figs at an early age. My grandparents had a beautiful fig tree in their sunny back yard in southern California. They cherished that green gem, which never failed to produce a plentiful supply of delicious, mouth-watering fruit. As part of his daily routine, my grandpa loved to go outside and pick fresh figs, and I was more than happy to dig into those juicy, pear-shaped edibles whenever I visited.



*stately shape of fig leaves*

Truth be told, I thought figs were rather exotic, but I liked their natural sweetness, smooth skin, spongy texture, and all those tiny seeds that offered subtle crunchiness. It wasn't until years later that I expanded my understanding of the special qualities of this highly nutritious fruit. Small but mighty, bite-sized figs pack a powerful punch of [health benefits](#), from soluble dietary fiber, to antioxidants and phytonutrients (which fight against free radicals that can lead to cancer, diabetes, infections, and other degenerative diseases), to a wide variety of vitamins and minerals (B-complex, calcium, potassium, manganese, copper, iron, zinc, and selenium) that help keep us feeling good. If I haven't yet convinced you to consider giving figs a fair shake, the recipes that follow this article may tempt your taste buds.

But first, here are some historical and botanical nuggets about this unique fruit. Fig trees, which date back to 5000 B.C., were among the first fruit-bearing plants that humans cultivated. In fact, fossils of figs have been found in Neolithic villages, and figs are mentioned in Biblical stories. Figs were highly valued in ancient times and are associated symbolically with peace, prosperity, and abundance. In tropical areas, fig trees are a keystone species that produce year-round food resources to help sustain life.

Figs are members of the [mulberry](#) family of plants ([Moraceae](#)). They are often referred to as "fruit without a flower." They are an example of inverted flowers that bloom inside the skin and then turn into fruit. You may want to learn more about the fascinating story of [how wasps succeed with pollination](#) inside a fig pod. Note that not all fig trees conform to that pattern. Most "common type" fig trees, *Ficus carica*, mature independently with [parthenocarp](#)\*, or fruit production without pollination or fertilization. I have to admit that part of my fascination with this fruit is the unusual nature of its defining features.



*unripe figs on branch*

Believe it or not, there are more than 600 varieties of common fig trees. When deciding which to purchase, gardeners should consider what types will thrive in their own horticultural zone. Figs don't like cold weather, so [here](#) in the Piedmont region (zone 7a), select varieties that can withstand a moderate freeze. Your best bets are: Celeste, Brown Turkey, and Magnolia fig trees (also called Brunswick), which can tolerate temperatures down to 10°-15°F. Celeste and Brown Turkey are excellent choices if you want to eat fresh fruit, whereas Magnolia figs are best for making preserves.



seeds and flesh inside figs

When planning to grow fig trees on your land, keep in mind that they prefer well-drained, loamy soil with a pH of 6 to 7 and lots of organic matter. Once well-established, these attractive horticultural beauties are sun-lovers that can tolerate drier soil and even drought. Fig trees appreciate being planted in locations that offer protection from harsh winter winds. For example, a site near a building or wall can provide helpful insulation from extreme weather conditions. My fig tree seems to struggle during the winter, so this year I'm going to build a chicken wire cage around it and then fill that with hay or straw to protect the tree from bitter cold. Younger fig trees will also benefit from a layer of mulch (1 - 2 feet deep) all around the trunk.

Remember, "right plant, right place, right time." If you are getting interested, the proper season to plant dormant fig trees from a nursery is between late fall and early spring. However, if you purchase container-grown fig trees, spring planting is best. Be sure to set the new tree 1 - 3 inches deeper in the ground than it was at the nursery. Fill the hole with healthy soil and give the thirsty plant a generous drink of water. Then you'll have to be patient, because fig trees may not produce much fruit for three or four years.

Perhaps my greatest challenge has been pruning the fig tree correctly. Check out this link to see [what I've discovered in my research](#). Avoid pruning a young fig tree during its first year. The next spring, choose a few strong shoots as "leaders" and remove all the others. The second year, cut back one-third of the plant's growth, making sure that the leaders remain. The goal is to train the tree while keeping its overall height in check. Careful pruning should continue for the first five years to help the fig tree grow upward with a desirable shape. Early on, I left too many shoots on my fig tree and ended up with a bushy specimen that fails to produce abundant fruit. Lesson learned.

Conscientious gardeners know how important good sanitation practice is, although fig trees are fairly resistant to insect problems. Birds and deer share my passion for figs, but netting or fencing can deter those visitors. As fruit matures, figs are subject to fruit drop. Possible reasons for this issue are: weak trees (e.g., insufficient pruning), cold weather damage (e.g., winter kill), or too few warm days to encourage ample fruit production. But given sufficient TLC, a fig tree can yield many years of handsome foliage and delectable harvests. Go for it!

*\*Some species of fig trees, including many modern cultivars of common figs, will develop their syconia into fleshy fruits without pollination or fertilization, a situation known botanically as parthenocarpy. Thus, the tiny gall-wasp is not needed to form fig fruits, although no seeds are produced if pollination doesn't occur. In some species of fig trees, if female syconia are not pollinated by gall-wasps, they simply abort and drop off the tree, according to Wayne's Word.*

As a delicious follow-up to your reading, these [easy recipes](#) prove that figs are a versatile culinary treat!

**Figs with Goat Cheese** (check out our Recipe of the Month for a variation)

Select ripe figs, rinse, and trim off stems

Slice each fig halfway down from the stem area, making four cuts

Gently squeeze the fig to create an opening; add a generous spoonful of goat cheese

Drizzle a small amount of honey on top and enjoy!

### **Bacon-Wrapped Figs**

Preheat oven to 400°F

Wash figs and trim off stems

Cut bacon slices into thirds and wrap each piece around a fig

Secure with toothpick and place on baking pan

Cook for 15 minutes until bacon is done and savor the flavor!

***Visit these links for more fig recipes:***

<https://www.southernliving.com/food/entertaining/fig-recipes>

<http://www.italianfoodforever.com/2018/08/all-about-figs/>

### ***Links to References and Resources***

<https://www.nutrition-and-you.com/fig-fruit.html>

<https://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/usda-nutrient-data-laboratory>

<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/FS1198/>

<https://animals.howstuffworks.com/insects/fig-wasp.htm>

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP307-I.pdf>

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# October in the Vegetable Garden

By Ralph Morini | October 2019-Vol.5 No.10



Is October really here? It's been a long, hot and very dry summer that has stressed gardens and gardeners alike. I'm a raised bed vegetable gardener and love the economies of soil management, weeding and watering that are my normal dividends.

This year however, the watering became burdensome, and if I'm honest, I really didn't keep up with it. In addition, I had stink bugs everywhere and for the first time, squirrels eating the tomatoes.



Photo: [gardensall.com](http://gardensall.com)

Recently, the deer, which seem skinnier than normal, appear to be less picky than usual in their food choices. It's been a tough summer for all of us outdoor mammals. Let's hope that fall brings both cooler weather and some rain.

On the positive side, if you planted some fall crops last month, they should be approaching harvestability. A good fall/early winter harvest helps us forget the tough summer and recharge enthusiasm for winter garden care and spring planting.

If you are trying to nurse summer crops deeper into the fall, frost concerns become a consideration. **The next few paragraphs are borrowed from last year's article written by Cleve Campbell. They provide a nice list of suggestions to help prevent frost damage:**

*October is paranoia season because in our area, it is the first frost month — usually around the 15th of the month. It can arrive earlier or later, but we know it is going to happen; we just don't know exactly when. I always have peppers needing just a little more time to turn to that brilliant red or perfect golden yellow, or tomatoes on one plant or the other that are slow in ripening, or that one lettuce bed that is just starting to rock, so I am glued to the weather report, trying to catch that first freeze warning. I can't count the times we've had a frost, and then right afterwards, Indian summer shows up smiling and bringing temperatures in the 70s and 80s for a couple of weeks after all the frost damage is done. I have finally come to the conclusion that waiting for that freeze warning is too late because there are **precautions that can be taken to extend the growing season before that dreaded frost forecast.***

There are **two types of frost, advective and radiation.** Advective frost occurs when a cold front sweeps into an area. A radiation frost occurs under calm winds and clear sky, allowing radiant heat from the earth to rise to the upper layers of the atmosphere. With radiation frost, the lack of wind prevents mixing of the air and an inversion develops. An inversion is just a fancy way of saying "things get turned around from the normal." Normally the air closest to the ground is the warmest, but when an inversion happens, cold air collects near the ground while the warmer air lies above the trapped cold air. During an inversion, cold air is just like water running down a hill — it seeks the lowest point because it is heavier than warm air, and frost pockets may form. The first frost typically is a radiation frost that occurs on a calm, clear night.

**There are several things we can do when a frost warning is issued:**

**Harvest early:** Flowering plants such as beans, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, squash and okra need to be harvested if there is no way to protect them. Fruit harvested in the mature green stage will still ripen, but sadly will not have the same flavor as a vine-ripened fruit.

**Water before a frost:** Moist soil can hold approximately four times more heat than dry soil. Moist soil can also conduct heat to the soil surface faster than dry soil, providing some frost protection. A Cornell University study suggests that **the air temperature above a wet soil is 5° higher than that above a dry soil**, and in the study, that difference was maintained until 6 a.m. The conclusion of this study was that plants could benefit from watering the evening before a frost.

**Cover your plants:** A cover can provide anywhere from 2° to 6° F of protection, depending on the type of material used. The covers can be laid right on top of the plants or can be supported by stakes or a frame, the main difference being that there is **less frost protection when the cover touches the plant.** Any material can be used as cover; however, woven fabrics are better insulators than

plastics or paper. The best time to apply covers is in the late afternoon after the wind dies down. Remove the covers the next morning.



*"Hoop-House" with plastic being used for frost protection*



*Row cover provides 2° to 6° F of frost protection*

### **Additional Tips and Tasks for October:**

- **Plant garlic and shallots** to harvest next year. Check out this [article](#) from the September 2015 Garden Shed for garlic growing advice.
- **Harvest tender herbs** (basil) before the first frost. They can be hung to dry in a cool dark place or the leaves can be frozen for use at a later time.
- **If you are thinking about planting a fruit tree, fall is the time to plant.** You may be able to save a little money by catching a sale at local garden centers. Water the newly-planted tree thoroughly to provide sufficient moisture and prevent winter damage. Add a 3-inch layer of organic mulch, leaving a 3-4" gap around the tree base, to retain soil moisture and moderate soil temperature. Research has shown that roots will continue to grow until the soil freezes, which is typically late November in Virginia. Stake and wire newly-planted trees only if necessary. Use a piece of rubber hose around the guy wires to protect the trunk. The guy wires should be tied loosely enough so that the tree is able to move a little in the wind. The supports and stakes should be removed once the tree becomes established, usually in a couple of months.
- Fall is an excellent time for taking **soil samples**. A soil test measures the pH (acidity or alkalinity) of the soil and the levels of some of the major elements required for plant growth, such as phosphorus, magnesium and potassium. If lime is required to adjust the pH, now is a good time to apply it. A free soil test kit is available from your local extension office.

- Pick up dropped fruit from under fruit trees so that deer and rodents will not be attracted to the fruit or your growing tree. Raking and disposing of diseased leaves will help keep insects and diseases under control next season.
- High grass and mulch are a haven for rodents whose gnawing can severely damage trunks. Keep the grass mowed around new trees. **Be sure that mulch is raked back 3-4 inches away from the base of the tree.**
- Tomatoes need an average daily temperature of 65° F or higher in order to ripen. If daytime temperatures are consistently below this temperature, pick the fruits that have begun to change color and bring them inside to ripen.
- **Harvest sweet potatoes** before frost because cold soil temperatures can reduce their quality and storage life. Removing the vine first can make the digging a lot easier. Also, take care when digging sweet potatoes because they skin and bruise very easily.
- When removing disease-infested plants or debris, **do not place this refuse on the compost pile.** The disease pathogens may continue to live in the compost pile and be transmitted when the compost is applied to the garden. Probably best to burn or bag and landfill it.
- After frost, cut back **asparagus foliage** to within 2 inches of the ground.
- There is still time to plant a winter rye **cover crop.** A cover crop protects the soil over the winter, traps any unused nutrients to prevent them from leeching, and adds organic matter in the spring when tilled under. These Garden Shed articles from [September 2015](#) and [August 2017](#) can provide guidance.
- If you aren't into cover crops, or wait too long to plant, cover the garden soil with a few inches of mulched leaves or aged wood chips. Reduce nutrient leaching, carbon loss and moderate temperature variation.
- If you haven't kept up with **garden documentation**, this is your last chance. It's a good idea to diagram the garden along with specific crop locations. Crop rotation is an important organic tool for minimizing insect and disease issues passing from one season to the next
- **Vegetable crops in the same botanical family are often susceptible to the same diseases and insects.** For crop rotation to be effective, gardeners should not plant vegetables belonging to the same family in the same location for at least two or three years. Obviously, crop rotation in a small garden may be difficult. However, we should rotate our vegetable crops as best we can.

Thanks for stopping by *The Garden Shed*; we look forward to your visit next month.

#### Sources:

Phillips, Ben, "Freeze Damage in Fall Vegetables: Identifying and Preventing," [http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/freeze\\_damage\\_in\\_fall\\_vegetables\\_identifying\\_and\\_preventing](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/freeze_damage_in_fall_vegetables_identifying_and_preventing)

Relf, Diane, Virginia Cooperative Extension, "The Virginia Gardener Newsletter," Volume 23, Number 9/10, 2004, page 7.

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# Plenty of Ways to Kill a Tree

By Cathy Caldwell | October 2019-Vol.5 No.10



Disclaimer: This article revises Bonnie Appleton's more entertaining Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 430-210 titled "**24 Ways to Kill a Tree.**" It builds on the work of Carolyn Rhondeau.

Trees have a way of dominating the first impression of visitors to our homes. Older trees imply historic significance to a place because they typically outlive their owners. Larger specimens frame the view from the street and provide priceless shade. Color, texture, leaves, flowers, seed and fruit mark the changing seasons for the neighborhood. Even a sapling will tell a story about plans and hopes for the future. Despite these unspoken yet noble sentiments, the sad truth is that damaged trees and poorly-tended trees cause passers-by to shake their heads in wonder at our negligence.

Although they may appear to be, and often are, the toughest plants we will own, if we take them for granted we do ourselves no favors. Here are some of the ways we treat trees: **the good, the bad and the ugly.**



*Girdling roots choke the tree eventually. Here it may have been caused by a "pot-bound" tree sold in a container. Photo: Scot Nelson.*



*Tree trunk girdled by barbed wire. Photo: Granger Meador.*

### **Ugly and Bad planting habits:**

- Planting close to a building or other structure reduces growing space above and below ground.
- Leaving a tree staked too long can allow guy wires or rope to girdle the trunk.
- Leaving paper wrap in place constricts the trunk and causes rot in the bark.
- Leaving the nursery wire or rope wrapped around a balled-and-burlapped tree will girdle the trunk.
- Planting near a downspout gives too much water and encourages shallow roots.
- Leaving the top of the wire basket intact from the nursery also girdles the trunk.
- Leaving treated or synthetic burlap in place prevents root growth.
- Digging the hole too narrow discourages proper root spread and will result in a tree that is vulnerable to high winds.
- Digging the hole too deep or letting gravel stay in the hole, which can drown the roots.

**Good Planting** begins with knowing the height and spread of the mature tree's branches so it will have room to grow away from obstacles. By the same token, space it away from a downspout and too much water. Especially for trees, dig the hole twice as deep and twice as wide as the spread of the roots. Do not amend the back-fill. Your goal is to site the trunk at the same depth it grew in the nursery.

If the plant is not bare root (many trees from local stores will be balled and burlapped), remove at least the top half of the wire or rope holding the balled root and all of any treated or synthetic burlap enclosing the root-ball. Most of the specimens a homeowner buys to put in the ground will **not** need to be staked. If you must use stakes, removing them after the first year will allow the roots to grow into their job of support. When the nursery has wrapped the trunk with paper, this needs to be removed. To protect your tree from nibbling deer, surround it with a wire cage wide enough to keep the nibblers out. Switches (very young trees) may need a tubular deer guard which can be replaced with the cage after a couple of years.

### **Ugly, useless and/or destructive pruning:**

- Pruning in summer.
- "Topping" the tallest branches to maintain the height you want; but see the following mistake.

- Allowing a “V” shaped fork with two co-dominant leaders.
- Leaving branches that cross and rub each other.
- Coating pruning cuts with any sealer.
- Failing to remove broken or dead branches.
- Leaving stubs of branches after pruning or creating the opposite problem of making flush cuts (“flush cuts” are flush with the trunk, cuts made inside the swollen branch collar).

**Good Pruning** is a skill that starts by learning to recognize the collar of a branch near the point of attachment. The collar will show a slight swelling of the bark at the base of the limb. Make the cut to leave the collar in place so it will grow quickly to cover the cut. Stubs of cut branches invite problems just as flush cuts do because the tree cannot heal itself.



Reducing the height of a tree may require a professional. “Topping” often induces vertical water sprouts which have to be removed later. When a tree is young, select a single upright leader and remove others that compete. Crossing branches need to be pruned because rubbing opens a wound for insects and disease as does the failure to remove dead wood. Sealing a wound actually keeps it open since the tree cannot naturally grow over the cut.

Here’s a general rule that with rare exceptions guides my pruning: prune in winter or before spring to insure that not too much sap will leak from the open cut.

*This photo shows the collar left behind by a proper pruning cut. The collar is starting to heal over. Photo: David Garth*

#### **Evil maintenance practices:**

- Scraping the roots and trunk with lawn equipment, **including** a string trimmer, which cuts off nutrients and water; remember, bark is alive.
- Ripping through the roots in order to dig a trench.
- Attaching items to the tree that damage the bark and girdle the branch or the trunk.
- Mulching closer than six inches to the trunk.
- Using non-porous black plastic above the roots.
- Stacking heavy items around the tree.
- Allowing weed-killing herbicides to drift on to the leaves of nearby trees.



*If you look closely, you can see that a mower “skinned” the above-ground root of a tree.  
Photo: David Garth*

**Good maintenance** keeps in mind that despite its heft, a tree is not impervious to harm. Any time lawn equipment contacts the bark, damage can happen. Mulch reduces the likelihood of chance encounters, but we never want to pile mulch against the base of a tree because this encourages shallow, adventitious roots. Two to four inches of mulch is enough to keep soil moist while permitting rain water to penetrate. If you must dig through a major root, prune it as you would a branch. Although trees are handy for hanging swings and birdhouses, these additions can wear through and girdle the bark. Likewise the soil around roots can become compacted by heavy traffic or weighty objects.



*A “mulch volcano” or “mulch mountain” around your tree is one way to kill it! Allow the “flare” (swelling where roots begin to extend outward) to show and apply only 2-4 inches of mulch.*

*Photo: Anne Marie VanDer Zenden.*

Trees are sturdy supports for hammocks and all sorts of lawn accoutrements. Most of the time, inserting a nail or screw into the trunk or large branch is OK because the tree can seal around the insertion. Periodically moving the line that holds a bird-feeder or swing, just an inch or two annually, will avoid strangling the branch.

A good tree takes a long time to reach its prime. It’s worth taking care of it.

#### SOURCES:

“24 Ways to Kill a Tree,” Va.Coop.Ext. Pub.No. 430-210, [www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/430-210\\_pdf](http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/430-210_pdf)

# Viburnum-A Shrub for Many Settings

By Susan Martin | October 2019-Vol.5 No.10



I first noticed the beautiful fragrance of Koreanspice viburnum (*Viburnum carlesii*) planted as a hedge at a commercial site. The bushes were as tall as small trees and had an abundant display of reddish pink buds turning to white flowers. I knew that viburnums needed more hours of daily sun than available in our wooded yard, but I had to try one. I brought home just one, not realizing that in this case more than one viburnum was necessary for fruiting, since no berries ever appeared. (More on this later.) Although the bush produced some flowers in the spring (more sun would have encouraged more blooms), there were no blue-black fruits in fall to attract birds.

## WHY PLANT VIBURNUMS

Viburnum is a genus of about 150-175 species of flowering plants in the moschatel family Adoxaceae. (Viburnum was previously included in the honeysuckle family Caprifoliaceae.) Viburnums are evergreen or deciduous, depending on the species and the location. Most prefer sun, but some do well in partial shade. Their hardiness is well suited to the cold winters of USDA hardiness zone 7. They are adaptable to a range of soil types and moisture conditions. Most viburnums offer attractive foliage, with a variety of leaf size, texture, and color. Many species offer eye-catching fall color in red-orange, burgundy, or reddish-purple. White blooms appear in early spring or even in mid summer. By choosing selections with different bloom times, gardeners can assure a long flowering period. In fall, berries appear in long drupes in colors ranging from red to pink, darkening to blue or purple-black. The fruit are a good food source for small mammals and birds such as the Eastern Bluebird, Northern Flicker, Gray Catbird, and American Robin. The berries of the blackhaw viburnum (*V. prunifolium*) can be made into preserves or eaten off the bush. Berries of the nanny

berry (*V. lentago*) are also edible. Most viburnums are mainly disease and pest-resistant, although some are subject to the viburnum leaf beetle. Native viburnums are noted as having special value for native bees, and attract many different types of butterflies and moths. Some native viburnum species are larval hosts to the Spring Azure butterfly (*Celastrina ladon*). Caterpillars of the Hummingbird Clearing Moth (*Hemaris thysbe*) host on European cranberry bush (*V. opulus*).

With so many viburnum species to consider, in this article I will concentrate on **viburnums native to Virginia**. I will also address **how many viburnums are needed to assure fruiting**, and the local threat from the **viburnum leaf beetle**.

#### VIBURNUMS NATIVE TO VIRGINIA



*V. dentatum* (Arrowwood) Photo: Fritzflohreynolds, Wikimedia Commons

**Southern Arrowwood (*V. dentatum*)** is a deciduous shrub native to eastern North America. In Virginia, it is found in the coastal plain, Piedmont, and mountain regions. Native Americans reportedly used the straight stems of this species for arrow shafts. This viburnum grows in USDA hardiness zones 3-8 and is adaptable to different soil types and moisture levels. Although it prefers moist loam, it can tolerate clay soil and is fairly drought resistant once established. It can grow in full or partial sun. It grows 6-10' tall and wide but can reach 15' in optimum conditions. It is a good candidate for hedges. White flowers are not fragrant but appear in flat-topped [cymes](#) about 4" across in May and June. Flowers give way to blue-black, berry-like drupes. Glossy green, ovate, toothed leaves produce fall colors that range from drab yellow to attractive shades of orange and red. Although not particularly showy, this is a reliable, cold-hardy bush tolerant of varying conditions with berries that provide food for both birds and small mammals. It is a larval host to the Blue Azure butterfly (*Celastrina ladon*).



*V. lentago* (Nannyberry) Photo: Keith Kanoti, Maine Forest Service, Wikimedia Commons

**Nannyberry (*V. lentago*)** is native to North America and in Virginia is found in the mountain area. It grows 12-18' tall and 6-12' wide with an open crown and arching branches. One explanation for the common name is that overripe berries have an unpleasant smell like wet wool. Another explanation is that nanny goats are more fond of the ripe berries than are billy goats. The shrub is drought tolerant, can flourish in full sun to partial shade, and can easily be grown in average soils. It thrives in USDA hardiness zones 2-8. In May, white flowers appear in clusters up to 3-5" across, and attract many pollinators. Nannyberry is also host to the Blue Azure butterfly. Variable fall color ranges from drab greenish-yellow to reddish-purple. Edible, blue-black, berry-like drupes hang in clusters from red stems. The berries often persist into winter and are attractive to birds and wildlife.



*V. prunifolium* (Blackhaw) Photo: David Stang, Wikimedia Commons

**Smooth Blackhaw (*V. prunifolium*)** is native to eastern and central North American in USDA hardiness zones 3-9. In Virginia, it is found in the coastal plain, Piedmont, and mountain regions. It is easily grown in average, dry-to-medium, well-drained soil and can tolerate drought. It prefers at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  day sunlight. Usually grown as a large, upright, multi-stemmed, deciduous shrub, it typically reaches a height of 12-15' with a spread of 6-12'. When grown as a single trunk tree, it may reach a height of 30'. In May to June, white, non-fragrant flowers appear in flat-topped cymes up to 4.5" across. The blackhaw uniquely places its flowers above its leaves (while the flowers on many viburnums are nestled). The flowers are followed by yellow berries that turn blue-black in fall. Fruits are edible and may be eaten off the bush when ripe or used in jams and preserves. They are also favored by birds and small mammals. The astringent bark was formerly used medicinally. This durable and pest-free plant is especially valuable to bumble bees. Blackhaw can be used as a small specimen tree or large specimen shrub. It is also used as a border addition, as a tall hedge or screen, or as a background planting in a native garden.



*V. nudum* (Possumhaw) Photo: U.S. Botanic Garden, DC, Wikimedia Commons

**Possumhaw (*V. nudum*)**, also commonly called **smooth witherod** or **wild raisin**, is native to the eastern and southeastern U.S., from Connecticut south to Florida and Louisiana. In Virginia, it is found in the mountain, Piedmont, and coastal plains regions. It grows in USDA hardiness zones 5-9. This rounded, multi-stemmed, upright-spreading, deciduous shrub typically grows in the wild to 5-12' tall and wide but can attain 20' in height. Although it prefers moist soil in full sun it will tolerate shade and can survive periods of drought. Small creamy-white flowers appear in April and May and are pollinated by many small insects, including hoverflies and sweat bees. The possumhaw is host to the Blue Azure butterfly. In late summer to early fall, flowers are followed by clusters of ovoid berries that change color as they ripen, from light pink to deep pink to blue to purplish-black. The berries are eaten by songbirds, grouse, wild turkeys, and squirrel. Glossy dark green leaves can turn an attractive maroon to dark red-purple in fall. Native to low woods, swamps and bogs, possumhaw is a good candidate for rain gardens. Be aware that this plant is **moderately** resistant to damage from deer. Cultivars such as 'Bulk', sold under the trade name of BRANDYWINE, are available in the nursery trade. Straight species can be found online.



*V. acerifolium* (Mapleleaf) Photo: Katja Schulz, Wikimedia Commons

**Mapleleaf (*V. acerifolium*)** is native to eastern North America from southwestern Quebec and Ontario south to northern Florida and eastern Texas. In Virginia, it is found in the coastal plain, Piedmont, and mountain regions and is able to do well in full shade and dry soils. It grows in USDA hardiness zones 4-8. It grows mostly in acid soil of pH 5.0 to 6.5, but can tolerate up to 7.5. This low, densely branched shrub grows 4-6' tall and 3-4' wide. Small white flowers appear in flat-topped clusters 1.5-3" across in early summer, followed by red berries turning to purple then black. The fruit is a food source for many birds and small mammals; the flowers attract pollinators such as bees and butterflies. Mapleleaf is larval host to the Blue Azure butterfly. The upright shrub often ground suckers and grows in dense clumps. Bright- to dark-green, deciduous foliage, maple-like in shape, turns a distinctive purplish pink in fall, making this a very desirable native shrub.

#### HOW MANY VIBURNUMS DO I NEED TO PLANT?

This is an important question that I would like to answer simply and definitively, but there just isn't enough information from the sources I've researched. First, let's remind ourselves that flowering will occur whether or not pollination occurs. Pollination is necessary for fruiting, in this case, berry production. Now let's review definitions. **Monocious** means that there are separate male and female parts on the same plant. The plant is self-fertile and you would only need one plant to produce fruit. **Dioecious** means that there are only flowers of one sex on a plant. You would therefore need one male and one female plant in order to reproduce.

Out of the five native viburnums covered in this article, Virginia Tech Dendrology identifies mapleleaf (*V. acerifolium*) as being monoecious; the other four natives are not identified as being either monoecious or dioecious. According to the New York Botanical Garden FAQ, "Viburnums are monoecious but you will get better fruits by planting plants from different sources. This is particularly true of *V. davidii* which is usually described as being dioecious."

According to NCState Extension, "As a general rule of thumb, viburnums are not self-fertile. This means that you need two compatible plants to cross-pollinate to receive the maximum fruit production. This does not mean that you can plant two of the same clone/cultivar and expect fruit (*you need genetic diversity*). Another

critical requirement is that for pollination to occur, both plants have to be blooming at the same time.”

According to the Urban Forest Ecosystems Institute at California Polytechnic Institute, all 14 of the viburnum species included in their review were classified as monoecious, including the two native viburnums on their list, blackhaw and nannyberry.

So, where does all this leave us? You can't tell if a plant is male or female unless it's in flower, and even then I would need assistance. If you are interested in making sure your viburnums produce fruit, you could refer to the following blog which I found very helpful in explaining the issues and proposed solutions: [“Native Viburnums and Cross-Pollination, What the Nursery Isn't Telling You.”](#)

A simplified summary of the blog:

Two genetically different plants of the same species should be planted in reasonably close proximity. And, those genetically different plants must be in bloom at the same time so that visiting insect pollinators can do their job. To ensure genetic diversity:

- Buy from a nursery that produces its plants from seeds.
- If this isn't possible, purchase two or more straight species viburnums (of the same species) from different nurseries that source plants from different growers.
- Purchase different cultivars of the same species of viburnum. (Be aware that in the case of *Viburnum dentatum*, it is a bit more complicated, so see the blog)
- Purchase a straight species viburnum and a cultivar of the same species, which are in bud or bloom at the same time.

## VIBURNUM LEAF BEETLE

Viburnum Leaf Beetle (*Pyrrhalta virnum*) is gradually coming to the Southeastern U.S. The beetle is native to Europe and was detected in Canada in 1947. The first report of its presence in the United States was in upstate New York State in 1996. This pest has been on the move, eating viburnums from upstate New York to northern Pennsylvania to western Maryland. It feeds only on viburnum species.

According to the UMD extension, “There is a high probability that viburnum leaf beetle will spread and become established throughout a wide region in North America due to climatic similarities with its native habitat and the wide use of viburnum species in ornamental plantings. However, recent studies indicate that its southern expansion may be limited by mild winters, as the eggs require a prolonged chilling period to hatch. The beetles spread naturally by flight, and artificially through people moving infested nursery stock into non-infested areas.”



*Viburnum* leaf beetle larvae on *V. dentatum* (Arrowwood)  
Photo: Plant Image Library, Wikimedia Commons



*Viburnum* leaf beetle adult Photo: Hectonichus, Wikimedia Commons

**Both adults and larvae consume native and exotic species of viburnum in natural and managed landscapes**

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Although it does not appear that this pest is currently damaging viburnums in the Piedmont area, we should be aware of possible danger in the future. It's noteworthy that climate change and its effect on moderating winter temperatures could affect the spread.

For readers who live in areas where the viburnum leaf beetle is a problem, please see the [Cornell University](#) site for recommendations on control. There is also encouraging news from the New York State Integrated Pest Management Program about a decline in the population of the beetles in Upstate New York.

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Feature Photo: *V. nudum* (Possumhaw) by JB Johnny, own work.

# Upcoming Events

By Susan Martin | October 2019-Vol.5 No.10

## [Master Gardener Information Meeting](#)

**Friday, October 18**

12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Gordon Avenue Library Meeting Room

201 E Market St., Charlottesville, VA 22902

Master Gardeners are volunteer plant educators of the Virginia Cooperative Extension, who teach our community about vegetable and flower growing, healthy lawns, and sustainable landscapes. If you love plants and would enjoy sharing their amazing qualities with others, you can learn more about being a Master Gardener at this upcoming Info Meeting.

The next training class for becoming a Piedmont Master Gardener (PMG) begins in February 2020. If interested, you'll need to **submit an application between October 1 and December 1, 2019**. Application packets are available at the Information Meeting, or by download at the [PMG website](#) (under "Volunteer"), or in person at the Virginia Cooperative Extension office on Stagecoach Road. For more information: Phone: 434-872-4580 Email: [info@pmgarchives.com](mailto:info@pmgarchives.com)

## [Piedmont Master Gardeners, Garden Basics Class](#)

**Right Tree, Right Place, Right Function**

**Saturday, October 19**

2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Trinity Episcopal Church

1118 Preston Avenue, Charlottesville, 22903

Find out how to plant trees that beautify the landscape and help the environment for years to come. Learn which trees are best for our area and how to plant and care for them. Preregistration is encouraged. Class is FREE; HOW TO REGISTER: Send your name and name of class to [info@pmgarchives.com](mailto:info@pmgarchives.com)

## [Master Gardener Information Meeting](#)

**Wednesday, October 23**

12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

5th St. Albemarle County Office Building

1600 5th Street Extension

Charlottesville, VA 22902

## [Virginia Native Plant Society Meeting, Jefferson Chapter](#)

**Wednesday, October 9**

7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

[Ivy Creek Natural Area, Education Building](#)

[1780 Earlysville Rd, Charlottesville, VA 22903](#)

The Virginia Native Plant Society, Jefferson Chapter, meetings are free and open to the public. This month's presentation by Steve Kruger, "Medicinal Plants and Other Forest Products," will be based on Steve's work using surveys and qualitative interviews to study the Appalachian non-timber forest products, particularly the trade in native medicinal plants.

## **McIntire Botanical Garden**

### **2nd Annual Community Night**

**Thursday, October 10**

5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

CitySpace | 100 5th St NE | Charlottesville, VA 22902

Hosted by Jill Trischman-Marks, Executive Director, McIntire Botanical Garden. Experience never before seen images of the garden design. Meet our local design team. Hear news and updates regarding the future of the garden.

### **Fall Open House: Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants**

**Saturday, October 12**

10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Jefferson's Tufton Farm

1293 Milton Road, Charlottesville, VA 22902

Fall is the perfect time for planting and the Monticello nursery will have a wide range of trees, shrubs, perennials, and bulbs for sale; overstock items will be discounted. The Charlottesville Tree Stewards will also be on hand with an additional selection of shrubs and trees for \$5 and \$10. Enjoy guided garden tours through the beautiful Tufton gardens. Thomas Vernon of Century Farm Orchards, Reidsville, NC, will present "Choosing, Growing, and Cultivating Heirloom Apple Trees." The Open House is a FREE event; no registration required.

### **Virginia Native Plant Society, Jefferson Chapter**

#### **Ivy Creek Natural Area Native Plant Walk**

**Saturday, October 12**

9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

1780 Earlysville Road, Charlottesville 22903

Join Mary Jane Epps, Assistant Biology Professor at Mary Baldwin University and Jefferson Chapter member, to hunt for mushrooms and other fungi and learn about how they interact with plants and animals to shape the ecology of our forests. Fall is the peak mushroom season in our area so there should be lots to discover. FREE; all are welcome. Meet at the kiosk near the parking lot.

## **Blue Ridge PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management)**

### **Invasive Plant Workshop**

**Thursday, October 17**

6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Albemarle High School

2775 Hydraulic Road, Charlottesville, VA 22901

This Open Doors Program (no outdoor element) will cover:

- How to identify and treat some of the most common and destructive invasive plants in this area
- Pros and cons of different methods to remove invasive plants
- What methods can be used in late fall and over the winter
- Where to obtain various kinds of assistance
- Discussion of where to source equipment and herbicides
- Availability of additional training and information

[Register Here](#) (cost \$20)

## **The Central Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Symposium**

### **“Going Native”**

**Saturday, October 19**

8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Blue Ridge Community College, Plecker Center

1 College Lane, Weyers Cave, VA 24486

#### **Speakers & Topics:**

Doug Tallamy - “A Chickadee’s Guide to Gardening (An old title with a new talk)”

Heather Holm - “What’s the Buzz About Native Bees ”

Ian Caton - “Four Seasons of Native Blooms”

Kevin Conrad - “Conserving Native Ornamental Plants for the Landscape”

Registration includes access to the speaker’s presentations, the vendor area for purchases of gardening items, information tables, lunch, and refreshments. [Register here.](#)

### **[The Nature Foundation at Wintergreen](#)**

#### **Trees of Distinction**

**Wednesday, October 23**

9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

3421 Wintergreen Drive, Roseland, VA 22967

Join Josh Palumbo on a tour through Augusta and Rockingham County as we search for trees of distinction. Our journey will take us to cemeteries, parks, schools, and more in search of state champion trees. Come with us to gaze at the living legends of the Shenandoah Valley. Bring money for lunch. [Register online;](#) space is limited, fees apply.

See the website for information on **nature hikes**; [registration](#) is required and fees apply. For more information: Phone: 434-325-8169 Email: [info@twnf.org](mailto:info@twnf.org)

### **[Blue Ridge PRISM](#)**

#### **Invasive Plant Workshop**

**Tuesday, October 29**

1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Rockfish Valley Community Center

190 Rockfish School Lane

Afton, VA 22920

See the information provided for the Blue Ridge Prism Workshop of October 17. There will also be an opportunity to identify plants, so bring samples of your mystery plants for identification. [Register here.](#) (cost \$25)

# The Ornamental Garden in October

By Susan Martin | October 2019-Vol.5 No.10



The beautiful fall days make garden chores a happy excuse to be outside. It won't be long before we're raking and mulching leaves, and putting things to bed. But we still have some time before we turn the last seasonal page on this year's garden. What should we do now, and which plants need our attention both in and out of the garden?

## HOUSEPLANTS

The nights have already started to get nippy, and it's conservatively safe to take houseplants inside once the nighttime temperatures start dropping below 55°F. Inspect plants for insects and diseases. Wipe the leaves with a damp cloth or spray them with the hose. Soak the pot in a tub of lukewarm water for about 15 minutes to force insects out of the soil. Check to see if roots are pushing through the bottom of the pot; if so, the plant needs to be repotted. If plants have gotten leggy over the summer, remove them from the container, and prune the top and roots in equal proportions. Replant in a cleaned pot with fresh potting soil (not garden soil).

Plants will need to adjust to the lower indoor light level. Be careful not to over water. If plants are dropping leaves, they may not be getting enough light. Place them in a south-facing window, if possible, or at least in an east-facing window. Place pebble trays with water below plants that benefit from humidity. It's a good time to take some cuttings from plants that have grown large over the summer. You can also take cuttings

from larger annual plants, such as coleus or begonia. Either root cuttings in water, or dip them in root hormone and place in soil.

### CARING FOR TENDER BULBS

Tender bulbs, including dahlia, canna lily, elephant ear (*Colocasia*), caladium, begonia (*Begonia tuberosa*), and gladiolus, are planted in the spring for summer bloom but cannot survive cold winter temperatures and must be dug up each fall.

Using a shovel or garden fork, carefully dig up the bulbs (or underground tubers or rhizomes). To the extent possible, avoid damaging the bulbs; diseases can easily contaminate plants through cuts and bruises. Although the general process is the same, the preparation requirements vary by type of plant. Most are dug up after the first frost but there are a couple of exceptions. The tops are cut back, but the recommended height varies. Some species should be washed, most are air-dried. The curing or drying period differs, as does the recommended curing temperature. Even storage temperatures vary. The [Missouri Botanical Garden](#) and the [University of Minnesota Extension](#) are good resources for highlighting requirements specific to different plants. Remember to label stored plant material carefully.

### FORCING HARDY BULBS

Making a plant flower at a predetermined time or under artificially imposed conditions is called forcing. Hardy bulbs are particularly suited for forcing indoors and offer a succession of color throughout the winter and spring months. Hardy bulbs are planted in the fall for spring bloom and include crocuses (*Crocus* species), daffodils (*Narcissus* species), hyacinths (*Hyacinthus* species), and tulips (*Tulipa* species). Bulbs should be potted up anytime from mid-September to December, depending on the desired date of flowering and the length of storage. If you cannot plant your bulbs immediately, store them in a cool place (35 to 55 °F). Bare bulbs can be stored for several weeks in the refrigerator prior to potting. Store them in a mesh bag or a paper bag with holes to permit ventilation. In general, plant in mid-September for flowering in late December, around mid-October for flowers in February, and in mid-November for March and April flowers. Refer to [Forcing Bulbs Indoors](#), Clemson Cooperative Extension, for detailed instruction on planting and forcing bloom. This source also discusses how to force paperwhite narcissus (*Narcissus tazetta*; synonym *N. papyraceus*) and Amaryllis (*Hippeastrum* cultivars) without cooling. Another useful source is the Virginia Cooperative Extension publication, [Fooling Mother Nature: Forcing Flower Bulbs for Indoor Bloom](#).

### GENERAL GARDEN TASKS AS THE MONTH PROGRESSES

**Plant spring-flowering bulbs** once the soil temperature has dropped to 60°F at a depth of 6-12 inches, (usually after the first heavy frost). For USDA hardiness zones 5 to 7 in Virginia, try to plant bulbs in October and November; in the small section of hardiness zone 8 in southeastern Virginia, plant in December.

**Cut back perennials** with disease or insect pest problems to reduce the chance of infection the following season. Bee balm (*Monarda*) and phlox (*Phlox paniculata*) with powdery mildew are examples. Remember to destroy, not compost, diseased stems and leaves. Cut back hostas and remove all their leaves from the ground as soon as the frost takes them. Dead hosta leaves harbor slug eggs. Although many plants add structure and interest to the winter garden, as well as seeds for hungry birds, cut back plants with browning or blackened foliage and bare stalks that don't add anything visually to the winter garden such as peonies (*Paeonia*), daylilies (*Hemerocallis*), and speedwell (*Veronica*).

**Certain plants do not like to be cut to the ground before winter** because the foliage protects their crowns. Plants that like some winter foliage protection include: butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), chrysanthemums, coral bells (*Heuchera sanguinea*), Siberian bugloss (*Brunnera macrophylla*), *Salvia x sylvestris*, lungwort (*Pulmonaria*), bearded penstemon (*Penstemon barbatus*), catmint (*Nepeta*), and Shasta daisy (*Leucanthemum x superbum*). If a perennial is growing new basal leaves, cut off the spent stalks but don't disturb the base.



Lungwort (*Pulmonaria*)



Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) Photo: Krzysztof Ziarnek, Kenraiz, Wikimedia Commons

**[Don't be in a rush to cut back healthy perennials](#)**, advises PennState Extension. **Cut back after several hard frosts have killed the tops.** In the spring, the plant sends up energy from its roots to produce beautiful foliage and blooms. Allow the roots time to reclaim that energy from the dying plant, keeping it strong for re-emergence in the spring.

**Evergreen perennials such as certain ornamental sedges** are not cut back in fall; remove dead foliage in spring and summer.

**Rake leaves out of flower beds.** If left in place, they may harbor pests and possibly certain diseases. If leaves mat down, they can prevent moisture from getting to the soil. After raking them up, mulch them with a lawn mower or mulcher and spread on flower beds.

**Make leaf mold compost** by collecting raked leaves in a pile. A simple bin made of chicken wire works well to keep them from blowing away. The video, [How to Make Leaf Mold, Turn Fallen Leaves into Gardener's Gold](#), has some good tips (and the presenter has a very convincing British accent). Viewers took exception to his saying that pine needles create acidic mulch. [See the Q/A from Oregon State University Extension](#). People were also surprised that it took two years to make the finest textured leaf mold. Of course, you can use leaf mold compost that is not totally broken down as a 1-2" layer of mulch laid on top of the soil. For the science behind the process of making leaf mold as well as instruction, see the University of Wisconsin Extension Pepin County publication, [Leaf Mold Compost](#).

**Start cleaning and storing any breakable lawn ornaments** or structures that a hard frost might harm. Clean pots in the fall to make things easier next spring. For concrete containers, try the following: leave the plant in the pot, dig a hole, bury the pot up to the top of the soil, cover the pot with leaves but leave the foliage exposed. I've had success the past two years doing this with an autumn fern (*Dryopteris*

*erythrosora*. 'Brilliance'). The fern came back nicely each spring.

**Do not prune shrubs and trees in autumn** unless you are removing damaged, dead, or diseased limbs. Pruning now may trigger new growth that cannot harden off before winter. The vast majority of woody plants should be pruned in winter when the plant is dormant. There are some exceptions. Check the Virginia Cooperative Extension's Publication 430-462 [Shrub Pruning Calendar](#), Publication 430-460 [Deciduous Tree Pruning Calendar](#), and Publication 430-461 [Evergreen Tree Pruning Calendar](#) for a listing of common woody plants and the best time to prune them.

For more tips on what to do this month, see "**The Ornamental Garden in October,**" from past articles of **The Garden Shed:** [October 2015](#), [October 2016](#), [October 2017](#), [October 2018](#).

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Feature Photo: Autumn Colours, Siddharth Mallya, Wikimedia Commons

# Fig & Goat Cheese Appetizer

By Cathy Caldwell | October 2019-Vol.5 No.10



If you have invited guests for dinner but really don't feel like cooking, try this easy, no-cook fig and goat cheese appetizer recipe. The mild-tasting fresh figs work well as a foil to the tangy goat cheese, sweet honey, and savory rosemary combination. I've long since forgotten the source of this recipe. I make it more or less from memory. Simple to make, the goat cheese mixture may be prepared ahead of time and refrigerated until ready to use. Then, just bring the mixture up to room temperature, spoon it into freshly-halved figs, and serve — perhaps with a chilled glass of champagne or crisp white wine. Any variety of fig will work, but I have a clear preference for Black Mission figs if they are available. For best flavor, select figs when they are at their peak — just slightly soft to the touch but not over-ripe. If the figs don't give slightly when you press them, don't use them; they're not quite ready.

## RECIPE:

6 oz. goat cheese (the 365 log style brand from Whole Foods is ideal for this recipe)

1 Tbsp. honey

1 tsp. finely-minced fresh rosemary

¼ cup heavy cream

1/8 tsp. each of salt and pepper (optional)

Fresh ripe figs (estimate two figs per person)

Mix together the goat cheese, honey, heavy cream, and rosemary. If the texture is too stiff, add a little more cream until the consistency softens a bit. Season to taste with salt and some freshly ground pepper.

Slice figs length-wise (from top to bottom). Place about 1 tsp. of the goat cheese mixture on each fig half. Arrange the fig halves on a platter and serve.