

Vancouver Island Master Gardeners Newsletter



**Cultivating Community
Since 1982**

Issue 20

www.vimga.org

December 2025

Dear VIMGA members,
Gardeners are always looking into the future, especially at this time of year. We plan our gardens in our heads: when we go for a walk, while driving, before falling asleep, sometimes in our sleep. Our best-laid plans don't always unfold just as we dream they will. But no matter how many setbacks we experience, the head-planning seems to spring right back. According to a Dalhousie University study, 74% of Canadians enjoy gardening. That's a whopping chunk of the population. What draws so many people to this pastime? I believe it's because gardening is about more than growing a lovely bed of tulips. It's about dreaming big, playing in the dirt, learning new things, and connecting with fellow gardeners. These are the things that keep us excited about the year to come - year after year. Aren't we lucky? Happy holidays and Happy New Year to you all - and may (most of) your gardening dreams come true!

Marion Waters, Editor

Next year, I'll . . .



President's Message

VIMGA Presidents Notes
Newsletter – Dec 15, 2025

Joyeux Noel, Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, Nollaig Shona Duit, and Frohe Weihnachten! Just a few ways to wish you all the best at this time of year from your VIMGA Board and committee members.

It has been a rain soaked month here in Nanaimo with a few sunny days scattered in. Glad we pulled up our dahlias this year as we normally don't but were inspired by Gwen's presentation at the AGM this year.

Our AGM this year was a grand event and though the timing was about 45 minutes off I think the consensus was "a good time was had by all". It is great to be able to get together as a whole group and the time seems to go too quickly for me. Members attending numbered 53 and most of our graduating interns came together for a great celebration.

Thank you to our members for some wonderful presentations and congratulations to our award recipients and graduates.

Excited to be looking toward our 2026 garden season and new student intake of 40 MG prospects. It will all get started with our Seedy "Sundays" and really get going with our SED on March 7 in Nanoose.

I hope you all have a wonderful December and I look forward to connecting with you in 2026. A couple of friendly reminders:

Member Dues – get them in by e-transfer if you have not already done so. They are due on November 30th! Regular member dues are \$40 annually.

Save the Date – March 7, 2026, Spring Education Day

All the best,

Mike



*** News from our Neighbours ***

North Island

Seasons greetings from the North Island

My goodness, how fleeting is time. Already we're near the end of another busy year for our members. As well as many of us being involved in various committees and positions, we've done our share of advice clinics. Of note, we've been able to attend 17 GAPs, mostly facilitated through the Comox Valley Newcomers Club, which we've enjoyed immensely.

Three of our interns – Whitney, Veronica and Margaret - received their badges to become full-fledged Master Gardeners at our recent AGM, and Kathy will be inducted at the SED this spring. Congratulations to all!

A number of us enjoyed a recent social gathering at the home of Cathy Lund. We managed to get some VIMGA business done during the pot luck lunch which was followed by a cookie exchange which helped get us into the Christmas spirit.

We're looking forward to the coming year, already on the radar is planning for the VIMGA picnic in July. It will be great to once again be able to socialize with our colleagues from all areas that we don't get to see too often.

Wishing everyone in our VIMGA family a very Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year 2026.



Cookie exchange - yum!



December get-together at Cathy Lund's home in Comox.

Parksville/Qualicum/Nanoose "PQN"

In PQN, we are closing the year with 15 CMGs, 4 Alumni and 1 Lifetime member. We are thrilled that our 5 interns (Peter, Mariah, Sylvia, Allison and Laurie) have graduated and joined our district as CMGs. Congratulations to them all! We would also like to welcome Aline B. as a new member to our district and to VIMGA. Aline has been an active member with the Vancouver Master Gardeners for many years.

Our group had a lot of fun this October participating in the Scarecrow Spectacular at Milner Gardens. In a matter of a few days, a small group of members were able to brainstorm and pull together a fantastic display. We would like to see this become an annual tradition.

In November, we had our planning meeting, holiday potluck, cookie exchange and Christmas crafting all in one day! There were many great ideas generated for clinics, collaboration with other gardening partners and social/educational events. These are some of the exciting activities we are planning for next year:

- Hands on learning opportunities in the Milner Food Garden for interns and CMGs.
- Collaborating with The Garden at the MAC for educational workshops and other activities involving food security.
- Field trip to the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific.
- Tours of our members' gardens.
- Extra clinic days at the Qualicum Beach Farmer's Market next summer after the success we had this year.

As we reflect on 2025, PQN members have contributed to the gardening community, made some great memories, shared some laughs and have had lots of tea and cookies!

We are looking forward to much more of the same in the new year!

Submitted by Jean Carr



Celebrating Allison Foot's and Sylvia Neden's graduation at Ruth's home. (Laurie Tandrup also graduated but was unable to attend)



Mariah Wilde and Jim Taylor



News from our Neighbours - continued

Cowichan



Fern Hietkamp - these are our raised beds with cover crop in them for the winter (fall rye and winter peas).



Fern Hietkamp at work on her property.



Hummingbird and snow.

Jo Canning Photos



Ice on Kale

Native Plants and Native Cultivars: What's the difference?

by Whitney Peek



As pollinator and native plant gardens continue to increase in popularity, so has interest within the horticultural industry to develop showy cultivars of these natives for our gardens. Many of these ‘nativars,’ as they are sometimes called, are sold as ‘natives’ in nurseries, but do they offer the same benefits?

Researchers at Oregon State University have recently completed a years-long study of the differences between several Pacific Northwest native plants and their associated popular nativars. The study findings are published in 2 parts, and are open access for all to read. The following is a summary of part one of the study findings.

This study focuses on a small set of native flowering plants you are likely familiar with:

- *Achillea millefolium* (Yarrow)
- *Aquilegia formosa* (Red Columbine)
- *Clarkia amoena* (Farewell-to-Spring)
- *Eschscholzia californica* (California Poppy, not native to Vancouver Island)
- *Symphotrichum subspicatum* (Douglas Aster)

Have you noticed the differences in your garden between bees’ interest in cultivated versus native versions of certain plants like I have? Part one of the study examines the differences in flower visitation by pollinators to native plants and to the associated nativars over several years of observations.

The findings concluded that for all studied plants, pollinator visits were greater to the native species over nativars. The number of different pollinator species (species richness) observed was also higher on native plants.

Additionally, specialist bees (bees that have evolved along with certain native plants and prefer them as pollen sources) were observed in greater numbers on native plants over their cultivars. Specialist bees are thought to be more sensitive to changes in plant traits (such as those found in cultivars) which could be an indicator that nativars have less ecological value in a pollinator garden setting.

Native Plants and Native Cultivars - continued



It's worth noting that there is value in having non-native plants in pollinator gardens. Although it's recommended to strive for a composition of 70% of native plants, non-native plants can serve important roles in a pollinator garden, such as for extending flowering times in your garden throughout the year. Having a succession of flowering plants, and several different ones flowering at once from early spring to late fall, provides maximum benefit to a diversity of pollinators throughout the growing season.

The study brings up another potential benefit of non-natives: having a section of your garden devoted to non-native pollinator plants satisfies “generalist” bees (bees that are fine with a wide array of pollen sources) such as honeybees. This matters because honeybees (an introduced species) tend to outcompete native bees for pollen resources. The researchers theorized that giving honeybees their own area of favourite plants could give native bees space to utilize their preferred native flower sources. Pollinator/plant interactions such as these are helpful to know about when considering which plants to include in pollinator gardens and where to place them for optimal benefits.

Overall, part one of this study reconfirms several previous studies' findings about the value of native plants, but since it focuses specifically on Pacific Northwest plants, it is more valuable locally. This study also gives more detailed information about native bees and their interactions with these plants than what has been previously known.

In a future newsletter, I will review part two of this study, which uses flower visitation data from part one and dives deeper to find out what it is about those particular flowers that make them more or less attractive to pollinators.

Part one of this study:

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ee/nvae126>

A short article about why saving native bees is important:

<https://botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/importance-of-native-bee-diversity-how-to-help-save-the-right-bees/>

Read a study about how introduced honeybees compete with native bees:

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1365-2656.13973>

Read about why ecologists recommend 70% native plant composition in gardens, especially to help birds: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1809259115>

It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas

by
Marion Woloschuk

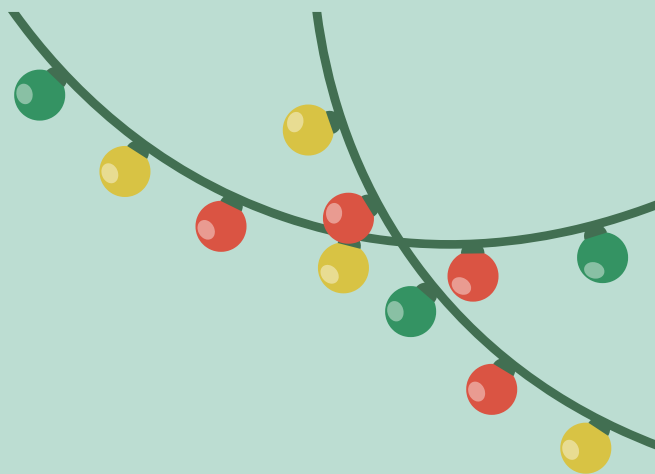


The weather's kind of blah and you're not yet in the Christmas spirit? I know what to do to brighten up the days. It's pretty easy to cheer up the old homestead with a bit of greenery and maybe some coloured lights and a ribbon or two. One not-so-secret, super easy and inexpensive way to perk up the outdoors is to repurpose large plant pots that held summer annuals with a jaunty outdoor winter display. If you don't have plastic or ceramic planters you can always make use of an old kettle, box or rubber boot to hold the arrangement, just use your imagination. Choose a sunny day (not when the ground is frozen) to work outdoors and gather a variety of branches and greenery – fir, cedar, dogwood twigs, holly – whatever you have in your garden or can scrounge (asking permission, of course, if you raid the neighbour's estate!). Then simply stick the greenery into the dirt in the containers in a pleasing arrangement, adding a red bow or pine cones or a Christmas ornament or two. These displays will last for months and need little or no attention. I do use only deer resistant greenery as my planters are out where the deer can get to them – you'll find out pretty quickly if you've provided a smorgasbord of tasty greens for these cute but annoying critters. Or put a similar arrangement in a pretty vase, to be set indoors where the aroma will fill your house with Christmas cheer.

Want to jazz up a door or gate? Create a swag from the same materials that you used for the planters. All you need is a nice mix of greenery, a few ornaments, ribbons and cones, a bit of twine, a glue gun and some silver or gold spray paint. Lay the branches out on a flat surface, I usually layer cedar on the bottom, followed by fir, salal and a few twigs of holly. Tie together near the top with the twine, leaving the twine ² long enough to be fashioned into a hanger as needed, making sure you have a nice balance of greenery. I then add a bit of glue between the twine and branches to really hold this together and wrap some ribbon around the top to form a bow with tails - or you might want to use a nice big red bow available at craft and dollar stores instead. Attach an ornament centered below the bow – a shiny star or birdie perhaps – and a sprinkle of pine cones. Finish by lightly spraying some silver or gold over the swag (this helps cover any imperfections in the greenery). and you have a finished swag. If you want to make a swag as a special present for someone, it can be personalized with a miniature ornament that has a special meaning for the recipient – maybe a miniature house, car, or dog or cat – you get the idea.

Stringing some outdoor lights is another surefire way to dispel the darkness. Drape them in tree branches, along a fence, or in your other arrangements of greenery.

I hope everyone has the chance to get outdoors for some fresh air and outdoor crafting – so grab the secateurs and tour your garden for materials to make a swag or fill a ceramic pot with Christmas cheer. Ho Ho Ho, it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas now!



Gifts From the Garden & For the Gardener

by Marion Woloschuk

This may be the year we look to the garden for inspiration for that special gift, large or small. With prices at the grocery stores enough to make people gasp, some homemade goodies will surely be appreciated by the recipient, and if you've thought ahead throughout the year your stash of preserved and handmade treats will save you from wandering hopelessly down the crowded aisles of retail stores looking for the perfect gift.

When we lived on the farm some of our "gift boxes" included a large roasting chicken (could take the place of a turkey) and homemade jellies, pickles and other foodstuffs that we knew people liked. Homemade mincemeat tarts (vegetarian despite the name) and ginger shortbread were popular hostess gifts. Dried herbs, garlic, apple cider, herbal vinegars, jams, chutney, curds, herbal teas, lavender sachets,

soap, medicinal lotions and potions and whatever else you make yourself (from product you grew yourself or found at farmers' markets or local stores) are all possibilities for that unique gift. The best part about these goodies is that they won't take up space sitting on a shelf once they've been eaten or otherwise used up (and hopefully the jar is returned for a refill). Thinking about a gift for a fellow gardener? A bag or basket of small gardening items, such as markers, packets of seed (perhaps some you saved yourself), twine, etc. can be fun to put together. There are plenty of books to be bought on various aspects of gardening available at your local bookstore or online or at your local thrift store. What about a calendar or membership in a local garden club? An indoor or outdoor plant might work if you know what the recipient needs or likes, prices can range from nothing (division from your own plants) to quite a lot (honey, can I have that huge Dogwood tree?). Good planters, especially the larger ones that make a wonderful focal point in the garden, are expensive and would make a super gift for that special someone (hint, hint). Maybe a birdbath or sculpture would do the trick, and a subscription to a gardening magazine or gift certificate to a local nursery are also ideas to consider.

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Frugal? Me? Why not make some "garden art" to give away or put in your own garden? Some projects are suitable for involving the whole family, keeps everyone productive during these short winter days and you get the satisfaction of producing something useful. Beats being glued to the telly, computer, or video gaming device. You can get lots of ideas from books, magazines and online sites. Make a hypertufa planter, design and paint some wooden garden signs, build a birdhouse or two, make a scarecrow that looks like your mother-in-law (oops, that was supposed to be "looks like the family pet"). The possibilities are endless and researching them is half the fun.

So use your imagination and enjoy a home-made, happy holiday season!



And a few more things . . .

Upcoming Events:

ROOT WASHING

When: Friday, April 10 from 1 to 3 pm

Where: Trinity United Church
6011 Doumont Rd.,
Nanaimo

Beth Walrond has taken on the task of renovating the landscaping around the church and has purchased a collection of plants in pots that need to go into the ground. This will be a great opportunity to get hands on experience with bare-rooting, root correcting, and proper planting techniques to get shrubs and trees off to their best start.

Rhodo big day in april

From Dorothee Keiser:

The Quadra Island Garden Club (<https://quadraislandgardenclub.com/>) invited me (Dorothee Kieser) to speak to them on Propagation. It was a very well attended meeting in the Island Community Hall with 50+ keen gardeners attending. Propagation is a topic of interest to many, especially this time of year. Lots of questions and good cookies.

On March 14 the Master Gardener class had its hands-on pruning workshop at my (Dorothee Kieser) place. Ruth had ordered warm sunshine and it arrived in time. Because the class has 40 students there was a morning and an afternoon session so everyone could get their hands "dirty". Thanks to all the mentors who actively participated and guided the students: Mary Shakespeare on apple tree pruning, Beth Walrond teaching us about rose pruning, Ruth assisting in so many ways, Jen Peterson and Meredith Potter on tree care. Very special thanks to Deb Gurrad who was the instructor for the session, Betty Cunnin (the course facilitator), and Christine Quist, Horticulture instructor- a wealth of information was presented. In contrast to my expectations (a little snip here, a tiny snip there), the students and everyone who participated did a tremendous amount of real work and my garden looks much the better for it. Now there is a big mound of branches and I am very happy.

aragraph text





vimga mANUAL, POLICY, bYLAWS UPDATES

THIS IS JUST AN EXAMPLE AND MIKE WILL FURNISH THE REAL INFO BEFORE THE DEADLINE:

YI VIMGA MEMBERS and INTERNS: not sure what a catchy title could be?

MEMBERS EDUCATION, QUALIFYING:

Members are reminded that all external Qualifying, Master Gardener Educational Opportunities for VIMGA members should be sent to CEC@vimga.org for distribution to members through the web site, email, and other media means. Members should not distribute Official Education Opportunities to VIMGA members (all) directly.

Manual Links for your further Reference (clickable):

[CMG Continuing Educational Requirements](#)
[Continuing Educational Committee](#)

Native Plants and Native Cultivars, Part Two
by Whitney Peek

In a previous newsletter (can we include a link?), I discussed the findings from part one of a recent study of the differences between several Pacific Northwest native species and cultivars of these species. In this article, I will discuss part two of this study, which attempts to figure out what traits make these particular flowers more or less attractive to pollinators, and why.

In ornamental plant breeding, changes in floral traits that are meant to enhance the beauty of the plant or its flowers can also unintentionally change other plant and flower traits. Typical changes in plants for ornamental purposes include plant height, flower dimensions (size and depth), and colour. Examples of unintended effects through breeding could include: flowers having little to no nectar or pollen (although some flowers are bred to have this quality, it doesn't apply to these species), pollinators unable to fit into flowers, and different nutritional content of pollen.

This part of the study measured differences between the native species (mentioned in part one) and their associated cultivars in several categories: changes in floral display, changes in floral rewards (nectar and pollen), and differences in communities of bee species that visited them.

The results of the study indicate that the bee communities that visited natives were overall very different to those found on native plants. Among bee species, there are many different functional traits that change how they interact with flowers, such as tongue length (to reach nectar), and style of pollen transport (backs of legs, abdomen, on tiny hairs, etc.) Considering the ornamental changes found in most cultivars, it is easy to see how the cultivars in this study attracted different sets of bees than the native species.

This study also analysed the nutritional content of the pollen among the species and found great variability within the different plant groups, but the researchers weren't completely sure why. They theorized that the gene tied to flower colour could also be tied to pollen nutritional content like proteins and lipids.

Interestingly, some social bees (ones that build colonies, like honeybees) show evidence that they can detect which flowers have the most pollen rewards, but whether native bees can do the same is understudied, especially considering 56 species of bees were tracked in this study. Bees that have that ability would be less likely to visit flowers with the lower nutritional content, making them less beneficial for pollinator gardens.

Image from part one of the study: the cultivars of *Symphotrichum subspicatum* originally found on Sauvie Island, Oregon (US). Photo by J. Hayes.