Autumn in the Garden

By Tina Will

 Fortunate are those of you who are still harvesting from your gardens, and fortunate for others that Farmer’s Markets, Braehead Farms, and Fredericksburg Food Co-Op make fresh produce accessible here. For many of us, lawn chores change from mowing to overseeding and applying a natural source of fertilizer (rather than commercial). Remember that the new guideline, to fertilize only once in the Fall (skip Spring), reduces by half the amount of fertilizer run-off from our lawns into our watershed. Fertilizing in the Fall feeds the roots thus giving new growth in Spring a strong start. Planting new shrubs or trees is best done in the Fall because roots can establish slowly through the Winter. If shrubs need to be pruned, it should be done with knowledge about when flower buds for next year are set. Some shrubs form next year’s flower buds in late summer and Fall: Forsythia, Witch-hazel, Fothergilla, Itea, Wiegela and others. So pruning those types now will reduce or eliminate the flowers you might have been hoping to see next Spring. Shrubs and trees that flower on new growth (next Spring) can be pruned in early Spring before flower buds will form: Vitex, Beautyberry, Smoketree, Crape Myrtle, Pee Gee Hydrangea and others. A pruning guide from New York Botanical Garden has a good list: https://libguides.nybg.org/pruningshrubs.

**New Interns and Activities**

 Lisa Ellis, our VCE Master Gardener Co-Ordinator, organized a Spring/Summer training class, and graduated 27 new Master Gardener interns this past August. We are getting to know them, and they have already volunteered to help at local Plant Clinics, Cossey Botanical Park, Chatham House gardens, our Flower Show in August, Fredericksburg Fair, Smart Green Lawn, and Cedell Brooks Jr. Demonstration Garden in King George. Their enthusiasm is refreshing!

 At Cossey Botanical Park, Master Gardeners are planning to change a perennial garden to an herb garden. We have had wonderful help this year from Fredericksburg Parks people providing mulch, and helping us with future plans. The mulch has kept weeds to a minimum, and nobody minds that! We will increase our collection of native plants and begin to make plans to reach more of the public with educational offerings.

 Our annual Seed Swap is planned for January 27, 2024, and will include activities for children and short lectures on garden topics. So save your seeds, and plan to bring them to trade, though having seeds is not necessary to attend. The event is always fun, free, and open to the public. Pictures from 2023 Seed Swap can be viewed at <https://www.mgacra.org/seed-swap-event.html>. Plans for 2024 will be posted as the event gets closer. If you do plan to collect seeds to trade, be sure to label them and include the year of harvest which should be this current year.

Visit our website mgacra.org homepage for a link to our recent lecture on Companion Planting (flowers and vegetables that like to be near each other). It was/is a great lecture, and full of good illustrative pictures. Our website also has lots of information about our events, lectures, and community involvement. Tune in and learn!