Greetings everyone! The end of fall semester is upon us and it seems that the entire world is busy finalizing projects and studying for end-of-semester exams. As always, the time between Thanksgiving break and the end of the semester just flew by. However, a nice break and a fresh start are on the horizon! Faculty, staff, and graduate students recently celebrated the end of the semester with a nice gathering at the Hahn Pavilion. We were also joined by six soon-to-be new members of our alumni family who are graduating with their B.S. degrees (see below). We offer them a hearty congratulations and good luck on their new adventures. Please join us in congratulating Robert McDuffie on his retirement (effective January 1) and thanking him for over 38 years of service on our teaching faculty. Many Landscape designers across Virginia trace their design skills to his residential design classes. His fall and spring garden trips are classics that are fondly remembered and will be greatly missed. In this edition we also welcome Debbie Osborne as our new Office Assistant. The proposal for the formation of the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences has made it through most of the university governance committees so we will be forming a search committee for the Director sometimes in January. Meanwhile... and we are still looking for our first snowfall of the season. However, it is Blacksburg and things could (will) change dramatically! I hope that you enjoy this edition of our monthly e-newsletter. Please pass it on!

Roger

Welcome Debbie!

We welcome Debbie Osborne, our new Administrative Assistant, who started in the department on November 14th. She recently retired from Montgomery County School District. A VT alumnus, she enjoys VT football games and has lived in Virginia most of her life. Her three grown children also live in Blacksburg. Her favorite flower is the sunflower and in her spare time she enjoys reading.
Robert McDuffie is Retiring!

After 38+ years on the faculty, teaching hundreds of wonderfully talented students, and serving the last 2 years as director of the Hahn Garden, Robert will be retiring from Virginia Tech on January 1, 2017. He made a very positive impact on our students over these years, and leaders in Virginia’s landscape contracting and design industry fondly remember his classes.

He and Nancy plan to spend more time with their children and grandchildren who are scattered across the country. They also plan to work together taking groups overseas on garden tours, culinary tours, and opera tours everywhere. As many of you know, Nancy had a much-needed heart transplant almost 2 years ago and is doing remarkably well. Starting a new life together, they want to thank all of you for your constant prayers. You can be sure that they have been answered. If you need to find Robert, he will still be playing basketball at noon on Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays at the War Memorial Gym.

Undergraduate News

Congratulations to our Winter Graduates!

- Michael Bolls - EHRT
- Thomas Dahlquist - EHRT
- Alysha Lawless – LCON
- Patrick Riley - LCON
- Kelly Weber - EHRT
- Rachael White - EHRT

After graduation, Rachel White plans to intern at a couple vineyards in Marlborough, New Zealand. She looks forward to learning how bulk wine is produced and how New Zealand wine production differs from Virginia and the East Coast. Marlborough is best known for its Sauvignon Blanc wine though Pinot Noir is beginning to take off in the region as well.

Mark Moritz of Dining Services taught a pickling lecture and hands-on activity in Alex Hessler and Stephanie Huckestein’s Home Gardening Class. One student said, “I really enjoyed pickling and the chef’s lesson. I did not know fermented vegetables were better for you, so I will definitely use these lessons to make more of my own stuff.”
Outreach

Dining Services Farm Update

This fall we began construction of a moveable high tunnel at the Dining Services Farm at Kentland Farm. The unheated, 72-foot structure is equipped with wheels and mounted on railings that enable it to be moved to three different positions along a 216-foot field. Compared to a traditional stationary high tunnel, the moveable tunnel facilitates more diverse crop rotation and provides season extension for multiple crops using the single structure. Students in the Sustainable Agriculture Practicum and the Civic Agriculture and Food Systems minor are assisting the construction.

Fresh Produce Food Safety Team helps Virginia Growers meet FDA Compliance Requirements

The Fresh Produce Food Safety Team has been very busy as they work to assist growers in addressing food safety requirements for the Produce Safety Rule and Preventive Controls Rule as part of the new regulation from FDA. In addition to several core team members, field members have received training as certified trainers to teach on-farm and processing food safety curriculum. USDA NIFA funding for the Southern Regional Center is providing training, education, extension, outreach, and technical assistance for 14 states. Additionally, Virginia Tech FPFST members, Strawn, Boyer, Eifert, Vallotton, and Williams are working with VDACS on an NIH grant to provide support and training as part of the rolling out of the FDA regulation. Closely tied to this work, Amber Vallotton also just received funding for a USDA specialty crop grant entitled, Building Capacity to Meet Virginia Produce Grower Needs for the Food Safety Modernization Act Water Testing. Working with Ling, Boyer, Strawn, and several field faculty, this 3-year project will pilot a statewide water testing program for growers covered under the Produce Safety Rule. These efforts and many others are crucial to providing the expertise, knowledge, and research-based information needed by our many produce growers in the Commonwealth.

Undergraduate News (continued)

Congratulations to the winners Greg Welbaum’s Medicinal Plants and Herbs container garden design contest!! Students in the class vote for the winner and this year there was a three way tie. The winners won Kroger Gift Certificates and are from left to right: Elisabeth Barker, Grace Earnhart, and Jesse Richardson.

Outreach (continued)

Master Gardener You Tube Channel!

We would like to announce the release of a series of short videos on plant propagation on the Virginia Extension Master Gardener YouTube Channel.

Over the past year, the Office of the State Master Gardener Coordinator has been hard at work developing material and content for our program! The newest addition to the library on our YouTube Channel is a series of how-to videos on plant propagation featuring: seeding, transplanting, grafting soft wood and hardwood plants, air layering, tomato grafting, and plant division, each filmed in the Virginia Tech greenhouses. They are also featured in our new online training modules and show the viewer how to propagate plants using the different methods. Each video is about three to five minutes in length and goes step-by-step into how each method is used as well as tips for making sure your plant propagates. Take a look at our channel here!

Thanks to the help of Sarah Gugercin, Velva Groover, Jeff Burr, and Dylan Brooks, these videos are now available to view and share!

Keep a look out for more videos coming soon and don’t forget to check out the YouTube page for more videos!

Meetings

In November, Megan O’Rourke participated in the fourth round of the Landscapes and Pest Control working group that convened at the Social and Environmental Synthesis Center (SESYNC) in Annapolis, Maryland. The group consists of scientists from around the world including Germany, Australia, and New Zealand working to develop an open source tool for planners to assess how land-use policies could affect insect pest outbreaks. Work has been ongoing since 2014 and the final tool is scheduled to be released in 2017 and will be available at http://www.naturalcapitalproject.org/InVEST/.

Publications

Megan O’Rourke’s lab is publishing research on sustainable pumpkin production in the December issue of HortScience in a paper entitled, “Reduced tillage impacts on pumpkin yield, weed pressure, soil moisture, and soil erosion.” The research showed that growing pumpkins using strip-till or no-till production methods can yield as well or better than conventional-tillage systems while reducing soil erosion up to 95% during heavy rains and conserving up to 30% more soil moisture during dry periods.


The young and old gather for the Horticulture Department Christmas Party!
Left: Sarah Holt and little Max enjoying the festivities.
Lower right: Charlie O’Dell, Vickie Barden, John Barden, and Joyce Shelton joined the gathering this year!

Velva Groover and her sister, Sarah Rudy, took Yujuan and Qining to Grayson Highlands on Black Friday. Sarah won 3rd place in the Black Friday OptOutside photo contest for the entry “Friends from around the world on top of the world”.

Watch the whole video here: http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/blog/optoutside-photo-contest-winners-virginia-state-parks

New Horticulture Blog!
Keep up to date on the latest and greatest in Horticulture! We plan to post a monthly story and provide information on upcoming events. We also have links to all of our past Monthly Newsletters and SEEDS annual newsletter.

Our first story honors Ron Morse, who received the 2016 Carl Luebben Soil Health and Water Quality Award, which recognizes a lifetime achievement in improving soil health and water quality.

https://blogs.lt.vt.edu/horticulture/