

# ANR

## NEWSLETTER

### Greenville-Emporia Spring 2022

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Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

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## Winter AG Programs

Sara Rutherford

The Master Gardener’s annual wreath workshop was held on December 11, 2021 at the Greenville/Emporia extension office. Participants had the choice of attending in person or picking up a wreath kit to take home. This was the second year a take-home option was made to participants. Those who attended in person were enthusiastic about their creations and appreciated the opportunity to learn and get out and enjoy a seasonal activity. In early January, our annual private pesticide applicator recertification course was held, and in February, a Dicamba certification training and a commercial pesticide applicator training were held at the extension office in Emporia. All pesticide education classes are typically held during the winter months and are crucial in ensuring pesticide applicators stay up-to-date with the latest regulations, application methods, technologies and safety recommendations. Pictured below (left to right): Two wreath workshop participants; Dicamba certification training participants.



## WHAT'S THAT WEED?

Sara Rutherford



Pictured above (left to right): Rosette stage (1<sup>st</sup> year), individual flowers & mature plant

### Common Mullein- *Verbascum thapsus*

Common mullein is a biennial plant; meaning it takes two full years to complete its life cycle before it dies. It is commonly noticed on roadsides, in forests and in disturbed areas. Some of its common names are wild tobacco and flannel-plant. Mullein have immensely hairy leaves and stems, making them appear blueish-green and flannel-like. They spend the first year in the rosette stage. Then, during the second growing season, they produce their flowering stalk that can take the plant to almost 6 feet tall. The flower stalks extend into spikes, up to 20 inches long, where dime-sized yellow flower occur. Each flower has five petals and matures into a capsule which hold the tiny brown seeds through the winter. Botanically, this hairy plant is classified as an herb, but you won’t find it in modern-day recipes.

## Upcoming Programs

**April 2- Rain Barrel Workshop** from 1:00pm to 2:30pm at the Greensville/Emporia Extension office. During this workshop, participants will make their own rain barrel from a recycled 55 gallon food-grade barrel. Cost: \$35.00 per rain barrel and includes all supplies and materials. Space is limited to 10 participants; register early! Payment must be made at the time of registration. Registration deadline is March 25<sup>th</sup>. Pre-register online with a credit card: <https://register.ext.vt.edu>; select Programs -> Agriculture -> Greensville/Emporia Rain Barrel Workshop, or, pay with cash or check at the extension office by March 25<sup>th</sup>.

**April 5- Vegetable Gardening on a Budget** from 12:00pm to 1:00pm at the Washington Park Community Center; 750 Dry Bread Rd. Emporia, VA. Join us at the center to learn ways to garden resourcefully and frugally. This will be a discussion-based program and is free to all. Registration not required but encouraged. Call 434-348-4223 or email [srutherford@vt.edu](mailto:srutherford@vt.edu) to register.

**April 12- Pond Management Workshop** from 10:00am to 12:00pm in Purdy, VA. This will be an in-person, on-farm program. Dr. David Crosby, extension fish health specialist, will take participants through farm pond management strategies including water quality, pond maintenance, weed control and stocking. Bring pond water samples for pH and alkalinity testing. Cost: \$10.00. Alternate site in case of inclement weather: Greensville/Emporia Extension Office. Registration Deadline April 5<sup>th</sup>. A limited number of scholarships are available. Payment must be made at the time of registration. Pre-register online with a credit card: <https://register.ext.vt.edu>; select Programs -> Agriculture -> Greensville/Emporia Pond Management Workshop, or, pay with cash or check at the extension office by April 5<sup>th</sup>.

**May 3- Healthy, Edible Gardens** at Washington Park Community Center from 12:00pm to 1:30pm. Learn the simple steps for building a successful edible garden and the preventable measures you can take to reduce food borne illnesses in and outside the home. Topics include site selection, garden design, soil testing, composting, harvesting, crop storage and food handling. This is a free program. Registration is recommended but not required. Call 434-348-4223 or email [srutherford@vt.edu](mailto:srutherford@vt.edu) to register.

## Using Small Grains for Forage

S. Ray Smith, Brinkley Benson and Wade Thomason- VA Tech

Cool-season cereal crops form the backbone of many farm enterprises in the United States, and Virginia is no exception. However, except for rye, Virginia producers make limited use of the tremendous forage potential provided by cereal crops. Wheat is one of the most versatile small grains for a farming operation. Due to its excellent winter hardiness, wheat can be sown later in the fall than barley and is a good choice for planting following a corn or soybean harvest. Wheat has good potential for pasture, silage, or hay production. Wheat will withstand wetter soils than barley or oats, but tends to be less tolerant of poorly drained soils than rye or triticale. It is not used as an all-purpose forage crop to the extent that it could be. Very short, semi-dwarf varieties have less forage yield potential than taller varieties. When grown for forage instead of grain, wheat should be planted earlier and at a higher seeding rate.

If wheat is to be grazed and then used for grain production, grain-yield potential should be an important factor in variety selection. Another consideration in variety selection is the length and roughness of awns. Livestock tend to favor cultivars with small or no awns. Forage potential is greatly reduced when wheat is grown on soils with a pH of 5.5 or less.

The use of triticale as a forage crop is gaining popularity throughout the country and particularly in the Midwest. Triticale generally has a higher forage yield, but lower quality than wheat. Triticale is a cross between rye and wheat. As such, it is adapted to a range of soils and does well on sandy sites. Tolerance to low pH is better than wheat but not as good as rye. Although pure triticale will not contaminate adjacent wheat fields with rye, triticale seed is sometimes contaminated with rye seed.

Rye is the most cold tolerant and least exacting in its soil and moisture requirements of all the small-grain cereals. Like wheat, rye can be sown in late August at 2 to 3 Bu/A to provide fall grazing, excellent winter ground cover, and spring grazing. The rapid growth of rye, both in the fall and spring, makes it the most productive of the small grains for pasture. Rye is the earliest maturing small grain for silage with good quality when harvested at the proper stage of growth.

### Seeding rates

|           |                                      |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|
| Wheat     | 120-150 lb/A or ~ 32-36 seeds/sq. ft |
| Barley    | 120 lb/A or ~ 30 seeds/sq. ft        |
| Triticale | 120-150 lb/A or ~ 32-36 seeds/sq. ft |
| Rye       | 90-100 lb/A                          |
| Oats      | 65-80 lb/A or 25-30 seeds/sq. ft     |

Increase seeding rates by 10 percent when planting no-tillage into heavy residue.

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# Rain Barrels- Gather, Use, Replenish

## VA Cooperative Extension

### Why use rain barrels?

Using rain barrels helps conserve fresh water supplies, which are limited around the world. Money can be saved on ones utility bill when rainwater is used instead of drinking (potable) water that is purchased from a municipal supply or pumped from a well. Water from rain barrels is easily accessible for garden chores or if the power goes out and the electric water supply pump or well pump won't work. Rainwater stored in rain barrels and used over time doesn't run off, which prevents erosion and pollution and improves water quality in nearby bodies of water.

### What are rain barrels?

Rain barrels are small collection tanks (larger ones are called cisterns) that are installed at the ends of or near downspouts to collect rainwater runoff from a roof. The collected water is stored temporarily for later uses, including watering lawns and gardens; filling birdbaths and water gardens; and washing decks, patios, and cars. This water is nonpotable, meaning it has not been treated and is not safe to use for cooking, drinking, or bathing.

A rain barrel has three main parts: the inflow, outflow, and overflow. The barrel can be placed under a downspout or within a few feet of one (see picture to the right).

Do-it-yourself rain barrels are inexpensive compared to manufactured ones. Manufactured barrels range widely in price and style and can be purchased at local garden centers or ordered online. Do-it-yourself barrels can be made for less than \$100 (barrel and parts). If you want to make your own, there are often family friendly rain barrel workshops that provide the barrels, the tools and parts, and instructors to help you make it for a reasonable fee. These workshops are offered by environmental groups and by Virginia Cooperative Extension offices. Videos and step-by-step instructions for making rain barrels are available online. Clean, heavy-duty, commercial food-grade barrels are recommended because they hold up well to the pressure and weight of water, but suitable barrels can be hard to find. Places to check for barrels include local Extension or Soil and Water Conservation District offices, local environmental groups, restaurants and food distributors (for example, barrels used for coffee, pickles, or olive oil). The various parts can be purchased from local hardware or home and garden stores either individually or in kits. Kits can also be purchased onli Maintenance of rain barrels is easy and is performed on an as-needed basis.



Homemade barrels should be a dark color to block sunlight and prevent algae growth inside the barrel. Use screens to prevent gutters from clogging or clean out gutters regularly so leaves and other debris don't restrict water flow. Check the gutters, downspout, barrel spigot, and outflow to make sure they are not clogged, especially in the fall when leaves are falling and in spring when pollen is heavy. Make sure all fittings and connections are secure. Check for leaks in any pipes and around the spigot and overflow. Make sure the spigot is turned off tightly after each use. If you live where winter temperatures regularly drop below freezing, drain the barrels and leave the spigots open so water doesn't freeze inside the barrel and crack or damage it. Rain barrels are not meant to be long-term storage. If the collected rainwater is not used within seven days, use small mesh screens like window screens to cover any open holes in the barrel (especially the top if it is open), or use products to control mosquito larvae to prevent mosquito breeding. The most common mosquito control products contain the active ingredient *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), which kills mosquito larvae for 30 days and is harmless to people, plants, and wildlife.

To read the full VCE article, visit <https://pubs.ext.vt.edu> and search for SPES-10P.

Interested in making your own rain barrel? Attend our Rain Barrel Workshop to make one of your own. Details can be found in the 'upcoming programs' section on page 2.

## Programs & Reminders

VSU's College of Agriculture offers many educational programs, online webinars, Facebook live events, workshops and field days. To find out more, visit: <https://ext.vsu.edu/calendar>

There is a \$50.00 fee for all returned checks.

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in extension activities, please contact the Greensville-Emporia extension office, (434) 348-4223, during the business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00p.m. to discuss accommodations at least 5 days prior to the event. \*TDD number is (800) 828-1120.



The health of your soil is important! Routine soil sampling is encouraged for lawns, ornamental and vegetable gardens, row crops, specialty crops and pastures. Soil sample boxes and forms can be picked up at the Greensville/Emporia extension office Monday through Friday from 8:00am to 5:00pm

## Small Grains, Continued

Fall grazing should be delayed until the plants are well established (6 to 8 inches high). Small-grain plants grazed before this time will likely suffer from severe defoliation and result in lower fall and spring production. On the other hand, excessive delay will result in rank, succulent plants, which are easily damaged during grazing. Stocking rate should be light enough to avoid continuous complete removal of top growth (graze to about 2 to 3 inches). Rotational grazing increases the production of small grains similar to that of perennial pasture grasses. Intermittent grazing should be timed to allow plants to fully recover (6 to 8 inches high) before the next grazing period. Research has shown that livestock trampling during grazing can sometimes have an influence on surface soil physical properties (decreasing infiltration rate and increasing bulk density); however, no significant reduction in productivity has been reported. It is likely that most soil surface changes arising from trampling are corrected by the freeze-thaw and shrink-swell action of winter.

In general, small-grain forages are low in minerals; therefore, forage testing is highly recommended in order to provide livestock a properly balanced ration. Small grains have the potential to provide supplemental nutrition to livestock as fall and spring pasture, as silage, and as a hay crop while serving as a winter cover, nurse crop, and/or scavenger of residual fertilizer nitrogen. For the full publication visit <https://pubs.ext.vt.edu>. Search for publication 424-006.

## Community Partnership Opportunities

Are you a member of a local organization looking to provide youth and adults with educational programs, activities and resources? Did you know our office has the ability to provide a wide range of research-based programs, activities and resources to everyone in Greensville and Emporia? We serve adults and youth through 4-H, Family and Consumer Sciences and Agriculture and Natural Resources programs. A few topics our programs cover are family financial management, health, nutrition and disease prevention, positive youth development, cooking and food safety, sustainable horticulture and agriculture crop systems, pasture management, insect identification, timber management, and plant disease diagnosis. Please reach out to us if you are interested in creating a partnership to bring programming into your neighborhood! We can be reached by calling 434-348-4223 or by visiting us at 105 Oak St. Emporia, VA 23847 to discuss opportunities.

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