# ANR Newsletter

## Greensville-Emporia
## Winter 2024/2025



Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Tech • Virginia State University


Greensville/Emporia Office
105 Oak St.
Emporia, VA 23847

Phone number: (434) 348-4223
Email: srutherford@vt.edu


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@GreensvilleEmporiaANR

# Fall Extension Programs

Sara Rutherford- Extension agent

In September we held an 'Essentials of sheep and goat management" program with VSU's Small Farm Outreach Program. We had participants from Greensville, Emporia and beyond! We participated in the Peanut Festival as a premier educational booth to promote information and knowledge about the peanut and it's history, nutritional value and farming practices. Also in September we held two peanut pod blasting clinics to help farmers estimate optimal digging dates for their Virginia-type peanuts. In October we participated in the Chowan Basin Soil and Water Conservation District's Farm Day for Greensville County third grade sutdents. Finally, in November we provided a well water testing clinic to those wanting to know what's in their drinking water.

Pictured below (left to right): Dr. Dahlia O'Brien- speaker, sheep & goat management program; peanut plants- VA Peanut Festival; Farm Day education program for Greensville County's 3rd grade students

# What's that weed?

Sara Rutherford- Extension agent

Pictured above (left to right): Duck weed on fingers; close up of giant duckweed species; and a mat of Duck weed in a pond

## Duck weed- *Lemna valdiviana*

If you have a pond and have struggled to keep aquatic weeds at bay, winter is the time to plan for weed control. Plan to start scouting your pond in March for weeds as the water warms. If you don't scount ponds until May, you will miss out on the crucial control window. Named for the ducks and other water fowl who transport this weed from pond to pond, it forms dense mats over large areas of the water surface. Duckweeds are free-floating and do not have stems or 'typical' leaves. They are a very small free-floating aquatic plants with a single small root dangling below. Watermeal (Wolffia spp.) is a look-a-like species that can be confused with duck weed. If you suspect you have this weed and desire identification confirmation, please call the Greensville/Emporia Extension office. For more information on this and other weeds, visit https://weedid.cals.vt.edu.

# Upcoming Programs

December 14, 2024- Festive Evergreens: Holiday wreath workshop at the Greensville/Emporia Extension office from 1:00pm until 3:00pm. Cost: $25.00 per person. Create your own fresh wreath with the help of our Extenison Master Gardener volunteers! Cash or check only. Registration deadline: December 6, 2024. Call 434-348-4223 to register.

January 9, 2025- Private (90 & 91) pesticide applicator recertification course at the Greensville/Emporia Extension office from 1:00pm until 4:30pm. Register by January 7, 2025 by calling 434-348-4223 or emailing srutherford@vt.edu.

February 12- VA peanut production meeting at the Paul D. Camp Workforce Development Center in Franklin from 8:30am until 12:00pm. Lunch served at 12:00pm. The VA Peanut Growers Association awards and brief meeting follows. Call or email Sara for more information. No pre-registration required and private pesticide recertification credits for category 90 will be available, pending approval, at the production meeting.

February 17- Pruning fruit trees: A hands-on workshop from 1:00pm until 3:00 pm at the Becker's homestead, 2310 Sussex Dr., Emporia, VA 23847. Come prepared to discuss recommended ways to prune fruit trees grown in the home landscape. You will get hands-on experience pruning trees and learn other benefical establishment and care techniques. Dress appropriately for forecasted weather conditions. The incliment weather make-up date is February 19th. Cost: $10.00 per person. To register, call 434-348-4223 or email srutherford@vt.edu no later than February 12th.

February 18- VA cotton production meeting at the Paul D. Camp Workforce Development Center in Franklin from 1:00pm until 3:00pm. VA Cotton Growers Assocation meeting from 9:00am until 12:00pm. Lunch provided to those who pre-register with the VA Cotton Growers Association. Private pesticide recertification credits for category 90 will be available, pending approval during the production meeting.

# Have you tested your soil recently?

## Virginia Cooperative Extension (www.ext.vt.edu)

A soil test can provide information on the proper amount of lime and fertilizer to apply to your lawn, garden and other areas of your landscape. When gardeners apply only as much lime and fertilizer as is necessary and at the appropriate time, nutrient runoff into surface or ground water is minimized, money is saved, and plant health is optimized. Soil testing can also be used to diagnose common nutrient deficiencies for plants that are growing poorly. The reliability of the soil test, however, can be no better than the sample you submit. For results you can depend on, it is vitally important that you take samples correctly to accurately represent the soil in your landscape.

When is the best time to take soil samples? Take a soil sample a few months before initiating any new landscaping–whether it be seeding a lawn, starting a vegetable garden, putting in a flower bed, or planting perennials. Sampling well in advance of planting will allow time for applied soil amendments to begin making the desired adjustments in soil pH or nutrient levels. Sample established areas–lawns, trees, shrubbery, and other perennials- at any time of year; however, an ideal time to take samples is when the garden season has ended in the late summer to early fall. Sampling in the fall allows time for corrective pH and nutrient management before new growth starts in the spring. Fall sampling also avoids a sometimes-busy spring period at the Soil Testing Laboratory, thus avoiding delays in getting your soil test results.

If an established area exhibits abnormal growth or plant discoloration, take a soil sample right away. For areas recently limed or fertilized, delay sampling at least six to eight weeks. A soil sample is a composite of numerous sub-samples, so a soil that is too wet will be impossible to mix together. As a rule, if the soil is too wet to work (or is good for making mud pies), it is too wet to sample. Another way to judge is to squeeze soil into a ball. If it easily breaks apart, then the soil can be sampled.

How often should soil be tested? If you live in the Coastal Plain region and have sandy soils, it is best to test every two to three years. The sandy soils in that region do not hold nutrients as long as soils in the other parts of the state and are more likely to become acid through the addition of nitrogen. The nutrient levels in the silt and clay loam soils of the Piedmont and Mountain regions change less rapidly with lime and fertilizer applications. In these areas, soil testing once every four years is usually sufficient.

Although late summer or early fall is the ideal time to soil test, consider sending in a soil sample in this winter to get a jump start on what your lawn and garden may need for the upcoming growing season. Stop by or call the Greensville/Emporia Extension office, 434-348-4223, for more information on soil testing. For inquiries via email, contact Sara Rutherford, srutherford@vt.edu.

# Disaster recovery from hurricane Helene

## Virginia Cooperative Extension provides support and education: Sara Rutherford

If you are not familiar with all Virginia Coperative Extension (VCE) does in our local community, you may not be aware that we assist farmers, ranchers, landowners and local governments with disaster preparedness, education, outreach and recovery efforts. With the hurricanes that have ravaged southwest Virginia, recently hurricane Helene, Extension has been in the forefront of recovery efforts; organizing hay and supply donations, as well as preforming agriculture damage assessments as required by the State Code of Virginia.

Over many years, Virginia Cooperative Extension has developed resources to help families and communities prepare for and respond to flooding and other disasters. These resources include practical guides, emergency checklists, and educational materials designed to enhance resilience and ensure safety as well as information from government agencies. Our VCE Director, Dr. Mike Gutter, recently spoke to the Virginia Association of Agriculture Extension Agents about our recovery efforts in southwest Virginia. He said “we are people helping people, that is what we do in Extension.” We are imbedded in our local communites and provide support in any way we can within, and sometimes outside of our assigned duties.

One of my colleagues in southwest virginia is currently organizing Exetnsion-led donations for hay, farm and fencing supplies, household supplies and figuring out how to get everything into the hands of those who need it. The biggest challenge so far has been finding transportation and funding for fuel to get hay, fencing and other supplies to southwest Virginia. Virginia was unfortunately overlooked by the national media as the storm did not impact a highly populated area, like Asheville, NC. For scope, Grayson County suffered the biggest losses, quantified at $61 million, or 38 percent of the statewide damage. Grayson county is VA’s largest grower and supplier of Christmas trees. Most Christmas tree farms in Grayson are considered to be a complete loss at this time due to flooding and wind damage from Helene.

Unfortunately, federal disaster relief funding had not gotten into the hands of the people who need it as of early November; two months after the damage was done. This means farmers were having to pay exorbatant prices to purchase hay & supplies and have them transported to their farms because most of the donated hay, even hay grown in VA, was being routed to sites in NC and TN where the media told us the worst damages were reported. Georgia had significant agriculture losses, in the billions of dollars, and little national attention was given to their region as well. Familes in southwest Virginia are in desperate need of our support as they struggle to keep their cattle alive and their operations running, not to mention feed and clothe their families. They also have personal losses; some losing their vehicles and homes.

If you feel compelled to support our families suffering significant losses in southwest Virginia, there are some ways you can help. The Southwest Virginia Agriculture Relief Program is a partnership between VCE, the Virginia Cattleman’s Association, Virginia Farm Bureau and others to help those impacted by huricane Helene. If you are interested in donating agricultural materials to farmers in need through VCE, please fill out this form: https://tinyurl.com/22ca7z42

Other ways to make monetary or supply donations are listed below. (To note, when you donate through VA Farm Bureau, they decide internally how to distribute your monetary donation based on their pre-determined relief efforts. Currently, they have stopped financially supporting the transportation of hay to southwest Virginia.)

- Farm Credit Hurricane Relief Supplies Collection: https://tinyurl.com/mrcjs8yw
- Virginia Cattlemen’s Association:
  Donations can be made online at: https://www.venmo.com/u/vacattlemenfoundation
  Or mailed to: Virginia Cattlemen's Foundation, PO Box 9, Daleville, VA 24083- Memo: Disaster Relief Fund
- Virginia Farm Bureau- Donations can be made online at:
  https://vafairs.com/virginia-farm-relief-fund/
  Or mailed to: VAFAIRS, P.O. Box 27552, Richmond, VA 23261- Memo: Disaster Relief Fund

# Programs continued

February 21- Commercial pesticide (3A, 3B, 8 & 60) recertification course at the Grensville/Emporia Exension office from 8:30am until 3:30pm. Cost: $20.00 per person. Bring a bagged lunch or go out for lunch. Call 434-348-4223 or email sammi@vt.edu for registration instructions. Cash, check and credit card payments accepted (credit cards accpeted online only). The registration deadline is February 14, 2025.

March 2025- Birds, Bees and Urban Trees at the Greensville/Emporia Extension office. Date & time TBD. Join us and Dr. Trakela Wright-Hicks, urban forestry specialists from VSU, about the way birds, bees and humans interact with trees in urban landscapes. Cost: free! Visit www.ext.vsu.edu/calendar to register for this event. For more information, contact Marilyn Estes at 804-481-0485 or mestes@vsu.edu.

Virginia State University's College of Agriculture offers many educational programs, online webinars, workshops and field days. For upcoming programs and events, 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 at the Greensville/Emporia Extension office, please contact the Greensville-Emporia Extension office, (434) 348-4223, during the business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday to discuss accommodations at least 5 business days prior to the event.
*TDD number is (800) 828-1120.



# Earthworms: What are they doing for my lawn & garden?

## Sara Rutherford

I get questions in the spring and fall about small mounds of soil on the surface of lawns or flower beds. These small mounds could be from a number of insect or mammal activities. It takes a keen eye to distinguish between the soil disturbances of insects, worms or mammals. If you've never had a lot of earth- worms in your soil, you may have overlooked their castings on the soil surface. Castings is the word used to describe the soil and plant litter that is ingested, passed through the worms gut and excreted as they move through soil. The activity of earthworms is greatest in the spring and fall when our soil moisture and soil temperatures are favorable for their activity.

Earthworms may appear to "damage" turfgrass areas but their casting mounds are mostly an indication of areas of bare soil in the lawn. On one hand, a population of earthworms is a good indicator of a very healthy turfgrass system. On the other hand, the mounds that sometimes occur as a result of earthworm activity close to the surface can look unsightly or cause a panic if a homeowner does not know what they are.

In a lawn, earthworms work as natural aerators. They turn over the soil in a steady and methodical manner without any real disruption to the turfgrass. Their holes improve the movement of water and nutrients into the soil and make them more available to the lawn. In addition, they are some of the best decomposer organisms that exist in the soil. They decompose thatch and, by doing so, help recycle nutrients and make them available to the grass again. Generally speaking, it is desirable to have a healthy population of earthworms in your lawn.

Finally, earthworms only become a nuisance when the soil is extremely moist and they must surface for air, bring their castings with them. This is why their castings are often seen in the spring as the soil warms and soil moisture is high.

It is also important to keep in mind that earthworm populations are harmed by the use of certain lawn care pesticides and there is not any pesticide product labeled for their control. If you use these products, understand that harm may be done to earthworm populations, which is not desirable. Thankfully, after a moderate rain event, most castings will settle back onto the soil surface, leaving no trace.

If you need assistance identifying mounds like this in your yard, contact Sara by phone 434-348-4223 or email; srutherford@vt.edu.

Pictured left: A small mound of earthworm castings in a lawn with sandy soil.