

## Have a Happy Thanksgiving

The ability to see the glass half-full rather than half-empty may be something we are born with, like small ears or large feet. Thankfulness, on the other hand, is a habit that can be cultivated.

It is so easy to be thankful in a garden. I thoroughly enjoy using clippers and loppers, often to my regret. At the edge of a small patio is a planter of dwarf evergreens. Two of them greatly outgrew 'dwarf' so last week I decided to limb them up and was suddenly aware that the tea camellia behind them was budded and a pink camellia in full bloom against a backdrop of lavender blue asters—an invitation to rest and be thankful.

I had a poorly growing Foster holly, tall and sparsely branched so I 'hat-racked' it, a process of chopping off the limbs to stubs so it resembled one of those tall skinny pseudo-furniture specimens that occupied front halls when gentlemen wore hats, at least the kind that came off once inside a front door. The promised result was supposed to be glorious rebirth. The experiment failed: the holly did not rush to fatten up but thankfully I have a 14-yr-old grandson handy with a chainsaw.

When you are counting your blessings I trust that one of those you count is living in a community rich in volunteers. If you are new to the Gloucester-Mathews area you may not know you are welcome to volunteer at schools, libraries, fire and rescue squads (with training), the Laurel Shelter, G.M. Humane Society, Boys & Girls Clubs, Literacy Volunteers...the list is endless. Behind the volunteers are the people who make our counties 'work'.

Because it was felt that the people on whose behalf county employees serve should understand the nature of those positions, the non-partisan civic group, Middle Peninsula League of Voters, has been having monthly meetings to inform the public. The response from Mathews and Gloucester county departments has been splendid, sharing their lunch time and talents so that citizens may understand how their governments function.

A recent meeting featured Mathews Extension Agent Nancy Roche who spoke with enthusiasm of the commitment to their community shown by the volunteers in Mathews. Those privileged to hear her were reassured and heartened because even with the current hacking cuts to Virginia Cooperative Extension's budget, Mathews County will continue to benefit from the programs.

The Master Gardener program is an outreach of VCE which in turn is the facility enabled by the 1914 Smith-Lever Act. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Congress realized that it wasn't enough that farmers worked hard: it was equally important that they worked smart. The land-grant universities were the result and eventually agricultural research became part of their mission. The Smith-Lever Act insures that the results of research doesn't remain in an academic ivory tower but is spread to every acre in the states. The educational outreach comes in many forms: there are extension agents and specialists in soils, turf, trees, diseases, insects, etc and specialists in family and consumer science as well as education offered to youth in 4-H programs.

The Master Gardener program is a comparatively new facet of extension outreach, having been established in 1972 in the state of Washington. According to the 2000 edition of the MG handbook, the program has spread to 48 states.

Putting knowledge into communities where it can enhance lives is dependent upon volunteers and they are legion in our area. You might be excused from hoping that their talents extended to filling potholes and paving roads.