



## Virginia Horticulture Specialist Team

*Authored by Kristopher S. Criscione, Assistant Professor and Nursery Production Specialist, Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech; Eric J. Stallknecht, Assistant Professor and Greenhouse Production Specialist, Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech; Kaylee South, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, Institute for Advanced Learning and Research, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech*

### Introduction

The horticulture specialist team involves a state-wide network of individuals with expertise across multiple horticulture-related topics. We are committed to assisting the Virginia horticulture industry and homeowners in managing or producing high-quality horticultural products that are grown sustainably, efficiently, and safely. The team conducts applied research experiments that are industry-relevant, and we present this information to industry through Extension articles, trade magazines, workshops, and in-service training for homeowners, growers, and Agriculture and Natural Resource (ANR) Extension agents. Below is a compiled list of Virginia horticulture-related specialists, organized by topic areas.

Please contact your county Cooperative Extension agent or horticulture team specialist for assistance. Below is a compiled list of the horticulture specialist team, including contact information and location (table 1).

### Consumer Horticulture



**Edward Olsen**

Virginia Cooperative Extension

- Consumer Horticulture Specialist
- Virginia Tech Blacksburg Campus
- edo@vt.edu | (540) 232-2136

Ed Olsen is the Consumer Horticulture Specialist and Extension Master Gardener Director with a 100% Extension appointment.

### Entomology



**Alejandro Del Pozo-Valdivia**

- Applied Insect Ecology: Turfgrass and Ornamentals
- Hampton Roads AREC
- adelpozo@vt.edu | (757) 363-3904

The focus of my research has been on insect ecology and improving pest management through the implementation of IPM strategies in several cropping systems. My main research areas have included the biology, life history, and natural enemies of my focal studied organisms. I am also interested in using new technologies to complement the execution of pest management tactics in farmscapes.



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**Thomas Kuhar**

- Vegetable entomologist
- Virginia Tech Blacksburg Campus
- tkuhar@vt.edu

Dr. Tom Kuhar is a Professor in the Department of Entomology at Virginia Tech, where he holds a research and Extension appointment focused on the ecology and management of insect pests of agricultural crops, particularly vegetables, field crops, and turfgrass. His research is driven by pest problems in the Mid-Atlantic U.S., and he has tackled 26 insect pests across 23 crops over his career. His lab seeks to solve problems and understand agroecosystems, often integrating basic biological studies with the development of integrated pest management tools to help growers.

## Fresh Produce



**Amber Vallotton**

- Fresh Produce Food Safety Coordinator
- Virginia Tech Blacksburg Campus
- avallott@vt.edu | 540-231-5655

I have a 100% extension appointment in the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences. As an Extension specialist and coordinator of Virginia

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Cooperative Extension’s Fresh Produce Food Safety Team, I collaborate with other specialists and agents on statewide extension programming related to food safety in produce production, harvesting, packing, and market access. A primary component of my work is building and strengthening partnerships with a broad array of stakeholders to foster a food safety culture in the Commonwealth.

## Landscape



**Laurie Fox**

- Horticulture Associate
- Hampton Roads AREC
- ljfox@vt.edu | (757) 363-3950

Develop resources, demonstrations, and training programs focused on urban water quality, residential stormwater management, and sustainable/resilient landscaping practices.

## Plant Disease Clinic



**Lina Rodriguez Salamanca**

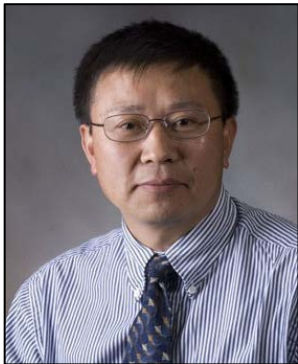
- Plant Disease Clinic Manager and Diagnostician
- Virginia Tech Blacksburg Campus
- linar@vt.edu | 540-231-6530



I manage the Plant Disease Clinic. I'm responsible for administering the laboratory and daily operation, and collaborating on projects related to Diagnostics. I diagnose plant problems from samples submitted to the clinic, report results, and provide disease management recommendations to clients to promote informed decisions, prevention, and risk mitigation.

I prepare and deliver educational curricula on plant disease and problem diagnosis to various audiences and stakeholders (growers, master gardeners, and extension agents). I maintain the VT Plant Problem Image Gallery <<https://apps.cals.vt.edu/ppig/>> as a disease diagnostic resource and promote its use as a monitoring tool.

## Plant Pathology and Water Quality



**Chuanxue Hong**

- Plant Pathology Specialists
- Hampton Roads AREC
- [Chhong2@vt.edu](mailto:Chhong2@vt.edu) | (757) 363-3908

The overall goal of my program is to develop science-based sustainable solutions to plant biosecurity, water, and environmental sustainability in a changing climate. We strive to develop a better understanding of pathogen aquatic biology, microbial ecology, recycled water quality, and improve agricultural water health. We endeavor to understand the etiology, pathogen biology, and epidemiology of new and emerging diseases such as sudden oak death (ramorum blight) and boxwood blight, and to develop immediate and long-term solutions to these diseases.

## Plant Production



**Kristopher Criscione**

- Nursery Production Specialist
- Hampton Roads AREC
- [kscriscione@vt.edu](mailto:kscriscione@vt.edu) | (732) 599-4274

The Criscione lab focuses primarily on understanding how container roots grow and develop, with the aim of improving efficiency in nursery and greenhouse production. We explore the relationships between root development (morphology, physiology, and architecture) and (i) irrigation delivery and scheduling, and (ii) soilless substrate physical and chemical properties. We also explore practical methods to “fill” the container with roots more quickly through agrochemical applications. A portion of my lab focuses on engineering container root systems to extend the shelf life of container ornamentals.



**Eric Stallknecht**

- Greenhouse Production Specialist
- Hampton Roads AREC
- [Ericjs3@vt.edu](mailto:Ericjs3@vt.edu) | (706) 206-1727

The Greenhouse Production Lab explores how light shapes plant growth, quality, and overall greenhouse productivity. Our team works with growers to develop practical and sustainable strategies for managing light using shading materials, greenhouse



plastics, and energy-efficient LEDs. We study how different light environments influence plant development and resource use, helping growers make informed decisions that improve crop performance and profitability. Through both research and outreach, we aim to support a more efficient, sustainable, and resilient greenhouse industry while training students and stakeholders in modern horticultural lighting practices.



**Kaylee South**

- Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist
- Institute for Advanced Learning and Research
- kasouth@vt.edu | (706) 491-9315

The Controlled Environment Specialty Crop Production Lab investigates strategies to improve the yield and quality of edible and medicinal crops in hydroponic greenhouses and vertical farms. Research focuses include biocontrol of fungal pathogens, microbial and non-microbial biostimulants, and crop evaluation across diverse species and cultivars. We collaborate with stakeholders to identify industry needs, guiding Extension resource development and student training. Based at IALR, the lab is part of the CEA Innovation Center, manages the CEA demonstration farm, and co-leads the annual CEA Summit East to support CEA education and innovation.

## Small Fruits, Pomology, and Viticulture



**Jayesh Samtani**

- Small Fruit Extension Specialist
- Hampton Roads AREC
- jsamtani@vt.edu | (757) 617-6990

The mission of my research and Extension program is to develop sustainable and economically viable solutions for berry production and to recommend practices that improve agritourism experiences for growers and consumers. Specifically, my efforts focus on (i) biofumigation for soil disinfestation, (ii) variety evaluations, (iii) extending harvest season, (iv) supplementary nutrient and biostimulant application, and (v) disease and weed management.



**Sherif M. Sherif**

- Associate Professor, Tree Fruit Physiology & Molecular Biology
- Alson H. Smith Jr. AREC
- ssherif@vt.edu | (540)-232-6035

Driven by a deep passion for life sciences, education, and the sustainable advancement of the tree fruit industry, Dr. Sherif's research and extension program is committed to unraveling the intricate complexities of tree fruit biology at both the



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macro and micro levels. By integrating a strong foundation in both basic and applied research, the program aims to identify and overcome biological, environmental, and genetic challenges that impact the profitability and sustainability of this vital industry.



**Drew Harner**

- Viticulture Extension Specialist
- Alson H. Smith Jr. AREC
- dharner@vt.edu | (540)-232-6050

The Viticulture Lab explores how viticultural practices, abiotic and biotic stressors, and environmental conditions in vineyard agroecosystems affect wine grape production, grapevine biology, and fruit composition. We use a range of field- and lab-based methods to develop recommendations and guidelines for sustainable wine grape production in Virginia, with current focuses on novel variety evaluation, cover cropping and groundcover management, and strategies for Spotted lanternfly management.

## Technology



## David McCall

- Turfgrass Pathology Extension Specialist
- Agricultural Technologies Innovation Center
- Dsmccall@vt.edu | (540) 808-9372

David McCall is an Associate Professor and Extension Specialist of Turfgrass Pathology and Precision Management. His team primarily focuses on reducing inputs through targeted applications across turfgrass systems, but also collaborates with Virginia Tech’s Horticulture team using remote and proximal sensing technologies.

## Weed Science and Turf



**Jeffrey Derr**

- Director, Extension Weed Scientist, Horticultural Crops
- Hampton Roads AREC
- Jderr@vt.edu | (757) 737-2650

Jeffrey Derr is a Professor of Weed Science as well as Director of the Hampton Roads AREC. His research and Extension programs focus on weed management in horticultural crops, including field and container nursery production, ornamental and turf landscape maintenance, and fruit production. He also researches control of invasive species, including Japanese stiltgrass, bamboo, and English ivy. He also oversees the turf program at the Hampton Roads AREC.



**Table 1. Horticulture Specialist Team Addresses**

| Field                                  | Specialist                  | Address  |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| Consumer Horticulture                  | Edward Olsen                | Saunders Hall; 490 West Campus Drive, Blacksburg, VA 24061 (407)   |
| Entomology                             | Alejandro Del Pozo-Valdivia | Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC); 1444 Diamond Springs Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23455 |
| Entomology                             | Thomas Kuhar                | Price Hall; 170 Drillfield Drive, Blacksburg, VA 24061 (216)   |
| Fresh Produce                          | Amber Vallotton             | Saunders Hall; 490 West Campus Drive, Blacksburg, VA 24061 (307-C)   |
| Landscape                              | Laurie Fox                  | Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC); 1444 Diamond Springs Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23455 |
| Plant Disease Clinic                   | Lina Rodriguez Salamanca    | Price Hall; 170 Drillfield Drive, Blacksburg, VA 24061 (104A)  |
| Plant Pathology and Water Quality      | Chuanxue Hong               | Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC); 1444 Diamond Springs Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23455 |
| Plant Production                       | Kristopher Criscione        | Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC); 1444 Diamond Springs Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23455 |
| Plant Production                       | Eric Stallknecht            | Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC); 1444 Diamond Springs Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23455 |
| Plant Production                       | Kaylee South                | Institute for Advanced Learning and Research; 150 Slayton Avenue, Danville, VA, 24540                                |
| Small Fruit, Pomology, and Viticulture | Jayesh Samtani              | Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC); 1444 Diamond Springs Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23455 |
| Small Fruit, Pomology, and Viticulture | Sherif Sherif               | Alson H. Smith Jr. Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC); 595 Laurel Grove Road, Winchester, VA 22602    |
| Small Fruit, Pomology, and Viticulture | Drew Harner                 | Alson H. Smith Jr. Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC); 595 Laurel Grove Road, Winchester, VA 22602    |
| Technology                             | David McCall                | Corporate Research Center; 1880 Pratt Dr, Blacksburg, VA (1121)  |
| Weed Science and Turf                  | Jeffrey Derr                | Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC); 1444 Diamond Springs Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23455 |

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