

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

January 2002

Happy New year!

May the year 2002 bring you health, happiness and good gardening.

We will mail the annual flier advertising the advanced training seminar soon. Please watch your mail very carefully, and read the instructions closely. I believe it will be printed on some brightly colored paper, but so are some of those junk advertisements. So, look closely.

The time to prune your fruit tree is coming up, and I want to remind you to save the scions for our grafting class. The grafting class has been so well received that we are planning to do it again. We will have more details in the February Newsletter, contact Luana Schneider if you have questions. To save the scions, you can seal the ends with wax and refrigerate, or you can place them in a sealed plastic bag and refrigerate. Also clearly identify the variety so we will know what we are selling.

I encourage all of you to attend the monthly foundation meetings; Pat Nelson (our new President) and the new board is cooking up some great programs. If you ever need a ride to the meeting, give us a call and we will try to help you find someone to pick you up, and deliver you safely back home.

The 2002 Master Gardener basic classes begin in March. If you have friends or relatives who would like to attend, now is the time to apply because the class is rapidly filling up.

See you at the next Foundation Meeting.

Al McHenry

Mark your calendars!!!

On Tuesday, March 26, from 9-12, Jenny Glass will hold a workshop for veteran Master Gardeners. Jenny is the Plant Diagnostician in charge of the Puyallup lab. The class is designed to teach us to systematically determine the cause of plant problems. Using samples and reference material, Jenny will help us improve our plant diagnosing skills. Look for information about signing up for this workshop in the February Newsletter. The cost of this class is being underwritten by the Master Gardener Foundation.

Northwest Flower and Garden Show

~Karen Gilliam

We have scheduled a bus trip to the flower Show in Seattle on February 6, 2002. The cost to members is \$14 for the admission ticket only. Guests' will be charged an additional \$5 to defray bus transportation costs. Total guest costs are \$19. We will leave the REI parking lot at the South Side mall at 6:30a.m. and return to the mall by 5p.m. You may take a lunch, or purchase one at the food court. (Sometimes the lines are long.) Dress comfortably, there will be lots of standing. To reserve a place, call Billie Lockwood at 360/733-8171. This trip usually fills up so don't wait too long.



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Newsletter

Deadline:

Third Wednesday of every month.

'Tis the Season

By John VanMiert

Catalogs and tools. The new catalogs are coming through the mail. Looking at the pictures in these works of art from flowers to vegetables always gives me the feeling of inferiority. I was never able to match their products, even when I bought their seeds. However, the catalogs shake the real gardeners out of hibernation, and start them planning their next season's crops. Remember that good planning is very essential to prepare for good results. Looking back to the previous years should guide you to making the right decisions. Of course, we can't value our tools enough. Protect all metal parts from rust with some oil or WD40. Wooden handles should be checked. Tools are only good if kept in top condition.

Yes, our enemies are still around us. January is the month for checking all spruce trees for green aphids. They are the cause for the previous season's needle drop. Their damage is usually not noticeable until much later, but the actual damage is done earlier. Use the watering hose with a pressure nozzle to shoot them off on smaller trees. I recommend doing this in December, January and February. If you like to use chemicals; be careful, read the label. Mild, dry days, with temperatures above 40° F., are conditions appropriate for doing dormant spraying. Be careful not to get lime and sulfur spray on painted surfaces of walls and decks. Early January is the critical time to do something to reduce the effects of Peach Leaf Curl. Spray for this disease with fixed copper or lime sulfur. Look in your favorite garden store and read the labels for other recommended fungicides. In fact, now is also the time to apply a good dormant spray on all of your fruit trees, using lime and sulfur with a superior oil for stickiness. Other shrubbery could benefit from the same dormant spray, like lilacs and roses. However, sanitation should be the first priority, raking up all old leaves will reduce many of the over-wintering sites of disease spores of the three ubiquitous foliar diseases in our region; blackspot, powdery mildew and rust. These fungus diseases over-winter on the fallen leaves and on leaves remaining on some of the plants.

Pruning time. The time for pruning fruit trees has arrived. Fruit trees should be pruned every year otherwise they become too bushy with too many branches which don't produce fruit. Peaches and nectarines bear fruit on wood that is one year old. These branches had the flower buds set last summer. A good dormant pruning will produce more new growth for next season. Apples, pears, apricots and plums develop their fruit on spurs. These are short pointed branches found along secondary branches. These spurs are often productive for approximately five years. Pruning is necessary to stimulate the growth of new wood. Tip pruning will increase sucker growth and retard fruit production, so prune back to last year's wood and to a bud.

Don't neglect watering and feeding. Make sure that the plants under the overhang of your home have enough moisture in the soil. Many times people don't realize that their precious plants are drying up during the fall and winter seasons, when they stop watering lawns and gardens. Dig down an inch or so, close to the roots, to check the moisture. Fertilize fruit trees and other established trees, shrubs, vines, ground covers, and perennials so new growth starts soon. Use a 5-10-5 commercial fertilizer or dehydrated manure. Emerging bulbs should be fed with 5-10-5 as well. Aged manure is also an excellent source of fertilizer for trees, shrubs and perennials. Fertilize indoor plants such as Christmas cactus. Best results are obtained by using soluble fertilizers for all potted plants. The plants can take up the fertilizer only in a soluble form. Most fertilizers drain out because of the frequent watering of the potted plants.

Forcing branches for early flowers. When you are pruning flowering trees and shrubs, collect the branches with the most flowering buds. The branches of many flowering trees and shrubs can be brought indoors and forced into bloom. Many of the flowering plums and several of the other improved varieties are worthwhile to force for their beauty. Forsythia can be forced to bloom in a very short time. It's still too early to do the final pruning on the roses and other cold-tender plants. Plan for late February to prune these. Also, leave the root-protecting mulches in place for another month. We can have at least one more arctic blast this time of year, so be prepared. Remember that plants in containers are more vulnerable to frost damage. Provide extra protection by placing the container in sawdust or hay or even storing in the garage during heavy frost. Even moving the container out of the windy area might give enough protection.

Mulching and wrapping. Very few plants need the winter protection of a mulching in our climate. The misconception that all shrubs, like camellias and a few others, need to be covered with burlap or straw is finally disappearing. The bundling up of shrubs might do more harm than good, because new growth may appear sooner, and if a severe winter follows the tender new growth is too soft to survive.

A good way to protect your perennials is by mulching with compost. Another good protection can be obtained by spreading evergreen branches over them; Douglas fir branches are preferred because of the abundance of finer needles.



President's Message



Pat Nelson (and friend),
MGF President

A traumatic 2001 has ended and we now welcome and look forward to a peaceful and productive 2002.

The December meeting was my first attempt at presiding! Thank you for your patience! Jean Powell (now there was a president) was presented with a beautiful Poinsettia and a round of applause for her dedication to the foundation.

Dick Steele was pleased with the amount of production at the greenhouse. He talked about the need for our own greenhouse. If any of you know of a good used one or a source for a reasonable new one – let us know.

It was decided that the Master Gardener t-shirts will have our state flower (Rhododendron) and insect (dragon fly) on the front. Jean Powell is looking into this.

Craig MacConnell and Al McHenry asked me to arrange a board meeting to work toward a goal of better communication between the foundation and extension office. We all felt that the meeting was productive and will continue working toward that goal.

Tickets are here for the Seattle Flower & Garden Show for February 6; so sign up, more on that elsewhere in this newsletter.

Jeffery Bergstrom from Bakerview Nursery wetted our appetite for bonsai by showing us that it isn't as hard as we thought. Now if you'd like to learn more, Sharon Lindsay will have a 'hands-on' class in late February or early March.

Our January Foundation meeting will be on the tenth at 7 p.m. our speaker will be Frank Thompson from Mt. Baker Orchid Society. In February Rick Wright from Sunbreak Nursery will speak on ground covers.

Marilee Wilcox and Diane Rapoza will now be in charge of treats, thus giving Billie Lockwood a long deserved retirement- thanks Bille for all of your hard work!

Our January board meeting will be January 4 at 11 a.m. – come join us!

Beginning Bonsai Workshop

There will be a Bonsai Workshop sponsored by the Master Gardener Foundation, Wednesday, March 13, at 7:00 p.m. at the Cooperative Extension Office Large Meeting Room, 1000 North Forest Street, Bellingham. Master Gardener, Sharon Lindsey, will instruct the workshop. The cost of the workshop will be \$13/person. Please notify and pay Christen Hurst at 360/366-5501 if you are interested, the workshop is already half-full.

The workshop is a beginning hands-on Bonsai Workshop. Create a miniature tree and learn how to keep it healthy. The workshop will teach plant selection, shaping, potting, wiring and general care. Everything needed will be supplied except the pruning tools. Please bring your own small pruning shears and wire cutters, printed handouts will also be available at this time.

For more information contact Christine Hurst at 360/366-5501 or email: cchurst@gte.net.

Rock Soapwort

Family: Caryophyllaceae (Pink family)

Genus: *Saponaria*

Species: *ocymoides*

When the New Year opens up before us, we tend to think of fresh, clean starts. So we'll celebrate the beginning of 2002 by featuring a plant that makes suds when it's crushed in water. Its common name gives a clue—soapwort—as does its proper one: *Saponaria* derives from the Latin word for soap. All of the plants in this genus share this characteristic because they all contain *saponins*, chemical compounds that produce foam when mixed with water. The good news about these compounds is that they have some pharmaceutical applications and yes, they made it possible in ages now long past to clean newly shorn wool, among other things. The bad news is, they can cause mild gastrointestinal distress in humans and animals. *Saponaria officinalis*, known commonly as Bouncing Bet, is a very tough plant,

extremely tenacious and tolerant of neglect. When it is allowed to get a toehold in areas used for pasture or hay cultivation, this scrappy species can cause harm to cattle. They will choose not to eat it unless nothing else is available, but it still poses a threat if it is contained in their hay or mixed among other weeds in their pasture.



Saponaria doesn't appear on the noxious weed list for Whatcom County, but just so it's very clear, the subject of this column is not *Saponaria officinalis* but *S. ocymoides*. It is one of 30 or so other species of *Saponaria*, all of which are native to Europe and completely hardy here, but quite variable in form and habit. *Saponaria ocymoides* is the sweet little plant of the genus, with none of the thuggish tendencies of some of its relatives. Its delicate appearance belies its tough nature, but it is not invasive or at all threatening to its plant neighbors. Deer don't bother it, and unless you keep a domesticated ruminant in your yard, you shouldn't

have a problem with this plant's very mild toxicity. Unlike other poisonous plants—and many plants are harmful if swallowed—*Saponaria ocymoides* has no enticing berries or other plant parts that beckon to animals and children. It grows to a height of eight to twelve inches and spreads from a central stem to a width of about a foot. It makes a tidy clump of neat, dark green foliage, with simple, smooth-edged leaves that appear to have a very, very narrow line of deep pink along their edges. You have to get very close to see it, but from a distance the effect is one of overall richness and depth. This foliage show, at least in my garden, is short-lived, however. *S. ocymoides*, an herbaceous perennial, shows up every spring. By mid summer all traces of it are gone except for a few tiny stems with a couple of scraggly leaves. It seems to put all of its energy into the late spring show that makes growing it worthwhile. Just about the time that most of the spring flowers have faded, rock soapwort puts forth a profusion of tidy little flowers that are a startlingly pure shade of pink. They are similar in form to those of phlox or aubrietia, but seem somehow more distinct against the foliage. The effect is very, very pleasing. The flowers always surprise me when they appear because every year I'm certain the rock soapwort is gone for good. But suddenly, the foliage and the flowers are there, again. The flowers hold on over a period of several weeks before they're replaced by a frothy pink foam of slightly sticky seed heads. That part of the soapwort show is interesting for another couple of weeks before the whole plant starts to look quite ratty. That's when I shear mine off and let it begin to regroup for next year. I don't count on it to lend visual appeal to my garden during the summer. Its show in the spring is so pleasant that I'm more than willing to give it the rest of the year off. It's a great way to divert the eye from the fading foliage of spring bulbs. Place it where your summer bloomers will take up the show when your *Saponaria ocymoides* gives it up for the rest of the season.

Even with the frothy profusion of seed heads, I've never had soapwort enthusiastically—and therefore, annoyingly—reseed itself. It's a very well behaved little plant. Give it a place with full sun and soil that's not too rich. A little bone meal in the early spring is all it needs to flourish, so long as its site is well drained. Soapwort does not like to have wet feet. It has a lovely trailing habit—again, remember its presence in your garden will be less than a full season long—and it softens the hard edges of rock

Weed of the Month By Laurel Shiner

KUDZU -A new state record for 2001

Pueraria lobata



On September 19, 2001, a concerned citizen who resides in Vancouver, Washington brought a plant sample to the Clark County Master Gardener office for identification. The plant was identified as Kudzu (way to go for the Master Gardener Program!). Aside from three recently confirmed kudzu sites in the Portland (OR) metro area, no other infestations in the Pacific Northwest had been found...until this year.

If you are not familiar with this plague of the Southern U.S., it is a very serious problem there and one of the most infamous of all exotic pest plants. The fact that it can tolerate our Northwest climate is startling. If you need more information on identifying this plant, please contact us.



THREAT: Kudzu, a native of Japan, was introduced to North America in 1876 as an ornamental, and was later promoted for livestock forage and erosion control. It is an extremely aggressive perennial vine. Kudzu vines can grow up to one foot a day, during peak growing season, (up to 60 feet in a growing season) and climbs over anything in its way. In the southeastern U.S., where it is now common, kudzu has caused power outages by toppling power poles and trees. Aside from damaging trees due to its sheer weight, the vine can also kill other vegetation by blocking out all light and by girdling trunks. Kudzu grows in a variety of habitats and environmental conditions, and rapidly invades disturbed areas. It out competes native vegetation and causes a loss of wildlife habitat, as well as impacting agriculture and timber production. It reproduces by seed and by spreading roots that develop adventitious shoots. Birds and mammals can disperse seeds

DESCRIPTION: Kudzu is a perennial, climbing or trailing vine, in the legume family. The stems of this plant are semi-woody, growing

up to 4 inches in diameter and 100 feet in length. Young vines are covered with tan to bronze hairs, older vines are usually hairless. The dark green leaves are made up of three leaflets, each leaflet having 1 to 3 lobes. The leaflets have hairs on both sides and are usually 3 to 4 inches long. Leaves are dropped in the fall and vines grow new leaves in the spring. Up to 30 vines may radiate from one root crown. The roots are fleshy, with the taproot reaching 6 feet or more in length, 7 inches in diameter and weighing up to 400 pounds. Vines will root at the node, where they contact soil. The connection to the mother plant eventually dies and a completely new plant develops from these roots. The reddish-purple, pea-like, fragrant flowers appear in late summer. The individual flowers are just under an inch across and are borne in hanging clusters, up to 7 inches long, at leaf axils. They produce a flattened, hairy pod, growing up to 3 inches long. Each pod contains numerous kidney-shaped seeds, looking similar to dried beans.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Kudzu can be controlled using mechanical or chemical means. Mechanical options include cutting, disking and digging. Persistent cutting of small stands may eventually kill out the roots. Cutting can also be used in conjunction with herbicides. Old established stands are difficult to eradicate with mechanical means due to the size and depth of the root system. Overgrazing by cattle has been used as a control method and works best on younger stands. Cattle are used to keep the plants defoliated for 3 to 4 growing seasons. This basically starves the roots out. For chemical recommendations, contact the weed control board. For any method used, the area must be rechecked for several seasons to ensure eradication is complete.

Continued on page 6

Plant of the Month

Continued from page 4

gardens and sidewalks. Pests don't bother it until the white flies arrive when its seed heads are at their stickiest. Grow rock soapwort from seed and set plants out in the garden after their true leaves appear, use commercial starts, or transplant the few volunteers you'll find. It makes a fine ground cover, although it is not dense enough to smother all weeds.

This sturdy little study in pink probably won't be much help to you as a laundry detergent, but it is easy to care for and pleasant to look at. It will brighten your garden each spring. And at this time of the year, it's important to remember that there will come a time, soon, when the clouds will lift and the sun will shine and we'll be out in our gardens again.

Weed of the Month

Continued from Page 5

The sample came from a neighbor's property. The property owner had shown the plant to her neighbor, an avid gardener, because she had concerns about recent changes in the growth of the vine plant. She had been managing the vine growing on her fenceline for the past two seasons, but this year the leaves appeared more distinct and flowers were developing on the vines. She had no idea what the plant was, and its rapid growth pattern made the potential for spreading into adjacent woodlands a real concern.

The MasterGardener coordinator, Celeste Lindsey, a past Clark county Weed Board member, was certain that the plant sample was Kudzu, but forwarded it to Dr. Charles Brun, WSU/County Extension Agent for confirmation. He concurred, and the sample was forwarded to our department for investigation. We compared the sample to descriptions and photos in our resource files, and also felt certain that we indeed had a Kudzu infestation. For confirmation, we contacted Tim Butler, head of the Weed Department for the Oregon Dept. of Agriculture. He confirmed our fears concerning this new invader, Kudzu. He informed us that there were. We also notified Bridgett Simons with the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board during this period.

Phil Burgess and myself met onsite with the property owner to determine the extent of the infestation and to investigate any possible means by which the plant invaded this site. She described how she found it growing on her fenceline, a wire stock type fencing about 4' in height that runs east to west on the north side of her property. This property backs up to a forested hillside that drops away from her backyard and fence. The fence previously had a healthy crop of Morning glory covering it, and she initially thought that the Kudzu was a form of Morning glory. She mentioned that the vine had twined up into a cedar tree growing next to the fence. Some dead canes showed evidence of the previous seasons' growth that she referred to. What alarmed her was that this season the plants leaves seemed larger than previous, and she noticed that a distinctive flower unlike the flowers from a Morning glory were forming on the vines. These flowers were one of the key identifiers for keying this plant.

We scouted the surrounding properties including the forested hillside that is owned by Bonneville Power Administration, Ross Complex. We found no further infestations and determined to attempt to eradicate this single plant.

In conversations with Tim Butler, he indicated that in Oregon, control efforts utilized Transline, A.I. clopyralid. He felt that Garlon 4, A.I. triclopyr, which is on Clark County BMP's approved herbicide list, would also achieve control of the Kudzu.

We utilized an Offender Work Crew and their Crew Chief to remove and bag all the Kudzu vegetation, by hand. These 10+ bags of foliage were sent to a landfill. As vines were removed, their source was traced back to the roots, and cut at this point. We discovered four rooting, in an area of about three square feet. Two of the rooting were clusters of multiple shoots and roots, while the other two were singular and smaller. We applied the herbicide Garlon 4 undiluted to each cut stem at the root crown. Marked stakes were inserted in the ground to aid in locating the treated roots next Spring.

Follow-up monitoring will commence next Spring, 2002.

Garden of Weeden

Common Burdock



Common Burdock is an introduced plant as are most of our weeds. It is also a member of the Composite (Asteraceae) family. It is a biennial introduced from northern Europe. It was first reported in New England in the 16th century and has since spread to most other states and Canada where conditions are appropriate.

Leaves are large, coarse, up to 50 cm long and 40 cm wide (1 inch= 2.5cm) and white woolly beneath. They are produced in rosettes the first year, and the flowering stem is produced in the second year. Flower heads appear in spike-like clusters in the axils of alternately produced leaves. This species, *Arctium minus* is famous for attaching to clothing and especially to the fur of animals by the presence of hooked bristles on the floral bracts.

Burdock is not a problem in cultivated land as it cannot withstand cultivation. It is an unsightly plant and problem in pastures, meadows, along roadsides, and in alleyways where plants are largely uncontrolled. Seed heads remain during the fall and winter and when people or animals contact them they are easily and widely dispersed.

There are two other species, *A. lappa* and *A. tomentosum*, neither of which are as weedy as common burdock.

By Richard Steele

Advanced Training seminar scheduled for Friday, February 15, 2002

~Merilee Kullman

The Ninth Annual Advanced Training Seminar will be held at the Bellingham Technical School on Friday, February 15, 2002. Look for the registration brochure in the mail, after the holidays.

We have an outstanding group of speakers scheduled for this year's seminar. They are: Art Antonelli-Diagnosis of Arthropod Damage on Landscape Plants; Russell Link -Landscaping for Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest; Eric LaGasa- Update on New Exotic Pests in Whatcom County; Dirk Muntean-Diagnosis and Treatment of Nutrient Deficiencies in Plants; Craig Cogger-The Science of Field Research; Bob Barker-Reforestation of Pasture Land; David Tarrent-Great Plants for the Pacific Northwest Garden.

Rod Tinnemore, the new Washington State Master Gardener Coordinator, will address the seminar during the opening remarks.

Check out our library

~Elizabeth Allwyn,
MGF Library Committee

The Foundation Library Committee wishes to remind you of worthwhile resources on the shelves in the MG office. Most books are for reference only, right there on sight, but a collection with colored dots on the spine is available for check-out.

An especially useful favorite is: Landscape Plant Problems: A Pictorial Diagnostic Manual It is from the WSU Cooperative Extension Service, with authors Byther, Foss, Antonelli, Maleike and Bobbitt (632 Byt). With very clear photographs and simple organization, this volume is a boon to us all and to our clients as well. It is *so* helpful that we provide copies both for reference and for circulation. Check it out!



Weeder's Digest is the monthly newsletter for the Whatcom County Master Gardener Program. Guest articles are encouraged. Please submit typewritten articles by the third Wednesday of each month to Karri at the Master Gardener Office. Articles can also be submitted by e-mail to: karrimac@coopext.cahe.wsu.edu. Editor uses MS Word for Windows and PageMaker 6.5. Any articles prepared on other programs or platforms should be saved as Text Files or Rich Text Files. Editor reserves the right to edit for space considerations, grammar, spelling and syntax.

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
WHATCOM COUNTY

Master Gardener Office:
Courthouse Annex 1000 N. Forest St.
Bellingham, WA 98225 360/676-6736


Craig MacConnell
Horticulture Agent

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
P.O. Box 646230

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**MASTER
GARDENER**

Dates to Remember:

January 10	7 to 9:30 p.m.	Monthly Foundation Meeting Extension Office
February 6	All Day	NW Flower & Garden Show Seattle
February 15	All Day	MG Advnaced Training Bellingham Technical College
March 13	7 to 9 p.m.	Bonsai Workshop Extension Office
Wednesdays	8 to 9 a.m.	Master Gardener breakfasts Babe's in Ferndale
Wed. & Sat.	9 a.m. to noon	Greenhouse work parties Penny Nordby's