

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

February 2002



Advanced Training is just around the corner – get those applications in!

The advanced training registration flyer was mailed out. Please fill it out and mail it back soon, the committee needs to know how many are attending. Once again, the committee has put together a fine seminar with subjects of interest for everyone; kudos for all their hard work.

Don't forget the monthly MG Foundation meeting on February 14. This will be the annual seed exchange, so if you have collected flower or vegetable seeds from your garden, or have seeds from other sources, bring them to the meeting to share with your fellow gardeners. Bulbs, corms, and other types of plant starts are also welcome. If you have not collected anything, come to the meeting and learn how. This is a fun time, so you won't want to miss it!!!

The 2002 Master Gardener basic training begins March 5. Any veterans who would like to refresh their training may attend; we've included a schedule. Remember that the trainees get priority so please sit in the back of the room.

See you at the next foundation meeting.

Al McHenry

Fruit Tree Grafting Workshop

Cambium...phloem...scion...do these sound vaguely familiar? Come to the Foundation's annual fruit tree grafting workshop and learn more about the botany and techniques used to graft desirable fruit varieties onto the rootstock of your choice.

The date is Saturday, March 2, from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m., and the place is the Tenant Lake Interpretive Center. We will have two varieties of apple rootstock and also pear rootstock available for \$2.00 each; scion wood is priced at 50 cents, or you may bring your own.

Naturally, we will all have our own pruning done by this time! Please remember to save scion wood from last year's growth for the workshop. You can either dip the cut end in paraffin or pruning sealer, or place the wood in a zip-lock bag and refrigerate. The goal is to keep it from drying out and cool, in other words to keep it dormant. Please make sure to identify it as to variety.

This workshop is one of the Foundation's many educational outreach programs for members and the public alike. We hope to see you there – and be sure to invite interested friends and neighbors to attend!

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Newsletter Deadline:

Third Wednesday of every month.

Garden Miscellany

By John VanMiert

Pruning. Lots of work, which should have been done in January, is left undone until February. By the end of February the pruning of birches, dogwoods and maples should be finished. If pruned later the bleeding of sap could be excessive. Complete the pruning of fruit trees and grapes by mid March. Roses should get their final pruning at the end of the month. We can have some damaging cold weather in February, so better wait until the end of the month. Climbing roses usually have too much uncontrollable wood all tangled up and need to be thinned out. If you wait any longer you might do damage to the new flower buds. So, if there are enough stems on the plant, cut some of the older ones out, because the newer younger shoots will produce the best flowers. Now is the time to do grafting of fruit trees and all other trees and shrubs.

Fertilizing. Fertilize all fruit trees and other established trees, roses, shrubs, vines, ground covers, and perennials as soon as new growth starts. Emerging bulbs should also be fed, they do well with dehydrated manure, or 5-10-5 commercial fertilizer.

Soil acidity decreases the activity of desirable soil microorganisms and, unfortunately, an acid soil increases the availability of toxic elements (such as heavy metals) in the soil. Soil acidity develops gradually as our abundant precipitation percolates through the soil. It leaches many dissolved nutrients below the root zone. Growing plants remove nutrients from the soil and some fertilizers acidify the soil more than others do. To correct soil acidity mix finely ground limestone (Calcium carbonate) into the rooting zone of your plants. Dolomite limestone should be used since our soil is usually low in magnesium. Dolomite limestone is part calcium carbonate and part magnesium carbonate. Use a soil test to determine the right amount of lime. Can we over do it with lime? Yes, but not easily. Lime can be applied anytime; however, if you apply it on top of the soil, always water it into the soil. There is still time to get lime on your lawn. Always wait at least 14 days after a lime application before applying a nitrogen fertilizer. If you apply lime and nitrogen together, the nitrogen volatilizes into the air.

Planting and transplanting. Deciduous plants should be planted or transplanted before they start their new growth. The month of February is the deadline for moving and planting deciduous trees and shrubs. Planting them later is never 100% satisfactory. It is a good time to plant bare root plants, such as fruit trees and roses. Now you can plant or transplant all deciduous shrubs and trees without being concerned about keeping soil on the roots. However, watch out for damaging feeding roots by exposing them to sun or wind.

Seeding. Now is the time to start indoor seed propagation. Sow hardy annuals in flats for setting out later. Tomatoes and peppers started now will be ready to set out after the last frost. The use of bottom heat helps germination. Water the seed flats with a fungicide to prevent damping off. Don't forget the light source, which can be standard fluorescent bulbs, set very close to the seedlings. Don't fertilize the new seedlings until after they develop their true leaves. Herbs should be divided and transplanted about every third or fourth year. Now is a good time to do so if needed. Overgrown perennials can be divided and transplanted before the new growth starts to show. Divide Rhubarb every **fifth** year. They will respond to an application of nitrogen fertilizer now. Well-rotted horse manure works very well also.

In mid February you can sow green peas directly in the garden. By late February you can sow frost tolerant perennials such as Arabis, Columbine, Coral bells, Delphiniums, and Veronica directly into the ground. If you have a cold frame with heating cables you could also sow seeds of cool season vegetables such as beets, carrots, lettuce, radishes, and spinach

Check our storage. Any stored geraniums and fuchsias should be watered more frequently to begin a new growth cycle. Pinch back any long spindly stems to encourage compactness. If you kept them in the dark over the winter, than they should be exposed to more light. A little feeding can be done to get them back to growing stage.

Check stored bulbs and tubers for signs of rot, best to discard the rotting specimens. Cutting out the rotted spots, dusting with sulfur and storing separately, can salvage dahlia tubers. Shriveled tubers should be sprinkled with some water.



President's Message



Pat Nelson,
MGF President

February – Hearts and flowers! Well, let's be honest – it can be a very gray month – if we let it — so let's not let it! We can start on February 6 with the Northwest Washington Flower and Garden Show. It is great fun and full of inspiration. The next week is our Foundation meeting – bring a sunny face!

At our January meeting, we discussed the following:

Jean Powell will order our t-shirts and sweat shirts soon – that's exciting—we all love the latest fashions!

Dick Steele said that our greenhouses will be bulging by spring and that he is still shopping for our own greenhouse. Keep your ears open for one.

Merrilee Kullman reported that the Advance Training is all set and that pamphlets were in the mail.

We formed three committees at our January Board Meeting and they shared what they had accomplished so far. The committees are: Looking into Greenhouses, Investigating Scholarships, and Researching Grants. The grants committee is for the possibility of funding our greenhouse.

If you would like to offer input on any of these subjects, join us at our Board meeting, February 1 at 10:30 a.m. at the Extension Office. (This time is ½ hour earlier than usual.)

Don't forget that the Foundation Meeting will be February 14 at 7:00 p.m. Bring your seeds for the Seed Exchange. Rick Wright from Sunbreak Nursery will be speaking on Ground Covers.

Be ready for some valentine sweets and don't forget to bring a sunny face!

Book Notes from our MGF Library:

~Elizabeth Allwyn,
for the Library
Committee

Here's a worthwhile lead:
*Manual of Woody
Landscape Plants* by
Michael Dirr.

In addition to well-written paragraphs on identification, ornamental characteristics, culture, propagation and uses of shrubs, there are very clear and helpful line drawings.

(Note: doing our own line drawings in this style of any observation will help immensely in our understanding of plant materials.)

Use the MG Library...it's here for you!

Plant Pathology Workshop

There will be a three-hour Plant Pathology Workshop on Tuesday, March 26, at the Central Lutheran Church, across the street from the County Extension Office. The class is scheduled from 9 a.m.-12 noon. Jenny Glass, the Plant Pathologist from Puyallup, will teach the class. There will be an hour of plant pathology review, followed by 2 hours of actual hands on diagnosis using samples Jenny will provide. Because space is limited, registration is required. Please call me, Merrilee Kullman, at 360/398-2408 to reserve your place. You can also e-mail me at fks360@hotmail.com. Please indicate if you are working in the office, as those people will get preferential treatment. There is no charge for this class; the Master Gardener Foundation is underwriting it.

Advanced Training

~Merrilee Kullman

If everything goes as planned, we should have another outstanding Advanced Training Seminar on Friday, February 15. If you haven't registered because you didn't get a Registration Flyer in the mail, (I haven't yet!) you will find one on our web site. <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/homehort/mg/mgarden.htm> The registration form can be printed from the site. I have been assured we will have food this year. The only thing in short supply will be parking. Carpooling is highly recommended. I'm looking forward to seeing many of you at the seminar.

Plant of the Month By Cheryll Greenwood Kinsley

Weigela: the plant formerly known as Cardinal Shrub

Family: Caprifoliaceae (Honeysuckle family)

Genus: *Weigela*

Species: just ten, but focus on the cultivars!

As usual, I have an ulterior motive for selecting a shrub as this month's featured plant. Consider it a sort of penance for breaking several cardinal—yes, the pun is intended—rules of garden planning. Captivated by the many flowering herbaceous perennials available for experimentation, I filled my garden with so many that I neglected the mid-level portions of my borders that rightfully belong to medium-sized shrubs. Any garden-planning guide would have predicted the outcome, if I'd only paid attention. After a few years the profusion of flowering glory spilled together in a haphazard fashion that left the viewers' eyes glazed and their brains confused. There was little visual structure to bind together all those colors and shapes, and what there was, tended to the very tall or the very short. After surveying the chaos, I considered where my garden might need calming regularity and middle-height presence. I identified the sites, chose the shrubs, and planted them amongst the perennials and larger conifers that I love, refusing to believe that a six-foot spread did indeed mean that the shrub would sprawl that far. Still resistant to the cautions raised by books, I rectified the situation, I thought, by planning backwards. Bad idea.

***Weigela florida* "Bristol Ruby"**

You careful gardeners who pay attention to those useful books know what happened. I turned my back for two seasons and those sweet, wee little shrubs answered the call of their genetic destinies and started to grow at an alarming rate. Suddenly—for this gardener, two years is "sudden"—it was apparent that everything was way too close to everything else. The leaves of that formerly small deciduous shrub didn't change size, and they still looked lovely against their backdrop, as I'd intended. But the shrub that bore them was elbowing its way into the conifer behind and crowding its neighbors, each of which was crowding right back. So because I planned backwards, I had to work backwards, removing, rearranging, and yes, even offing some things to make room for the shrubs to spread. Why did I think they wouldn't grow to the

dimensions in their descriptions? Who knows...but as I renovate my landscape, sometimes lugging shrubs across the yard to their new homes, I've had the chance to consider my deep affection for some of them. I've realized, for example, just how wacky I am about *Weigela*. My gardening forebears called it Cardinal Shrub, not to be confused with Cardinal Flower, by which they clearly meant the perennial *Lobelia cardinalis*. My best theory is that both derived the name from the color of their blooms. Cardinal Shrub—*Weigela florida*—was very popular a generation or two ago, because of its flowers in spring and its extreme hardiness and ease of care. All members of the genus are native to East Asia, where *W. florida* was discovered and brought to Europe in 1845 by Robert Fortune. It was named in honor of a German botanist; and by the way, in plant nomenclature, *florida* refers to the striking nature of usually red-hued blooms. It does not mean the plant is native to or has any other relationship with that state in the southeastern US.

When Fortune brought *W. florida* to Europe, the horticulturalists there took to it immediately, because of its form and flowers, toughness, and dependability. By the 1860s the attributes of the species had been enhanced through careful breeding. Today, there are more than 170 named cultivars, most bred in Europe and Canada. *Weigela* was once considered something of a bore because of its one-season show—its trumpet-shaped flowers in shades of red, pink, rose, and white were admittedly spectacular in the spring but when they faded, the shrub offered little but nondescript leaves on tangled twigs during summer and fall. But varieties of *Weigela* are now available with fabulous foliage, whether clear green, purple to nearly black, or yellow-tinged and variegated. Stems are in great demand by the floral trade for use in arrangements. The leaves are *that* attractive. In the garden, *Weigela* can offer three-season interest. There are yellow-flowered varieties, others that bloom a second time, and still others that don't *stop* blooming from June to September. There are cultivars as small as 18 inches for the front of the border as well as those that sprawl 10 feet in height and width, for the back, and lots of choices in

Weed of the Month By Laurel Shiner

English Ivy

Hedera helix 'Baltica',
Hedera helix 'Pittsburg',
Hedera helix 'Star',
Hedera hibernica
'Hibernica'

THREAT: English ivy, a native of Europe and widely introduced as a landscape plant throughout the world, was introduced into North America in colonial times. English ivy invades parks, natural areas and landscaped sites, growing over other plants and depriving them of sunlight. As a climbing vine, the weight of this plant can cause trees to become more susceptible to wind and storm damage. The vines root when they touch the ground and aerial rootlets help it to climb trees. As a groundcover, this plant grows in a thick blanket, inhibiting the germination and growth of other plants. In warmer areas, this plant grows throughout the year. English ivy reproduces by seed, which is spread by birds, and by stolons. English ivy grows well in most types of soil, and grows both in sun and shade. Once established, it is fairly drought tolerant. The leaves and berries are poisonous and the plant causes dermatitis in some people.

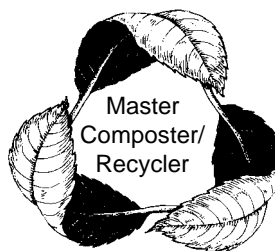
DESCRIPTION: English ivy (*Hedera helix*) and Irish ivy (*Hedera hibernica* or *Hedera helix hibernica*) are evergreen, perennial vines in the ginseng family. The two species are extremely similar and are both treated in this article under the name of English ivy. The woody, climbing vines grow up to 90 feet long. The leaves are dark green with light veins, and have a waxy surface. On old plants, the bark is light brown with shallow furrows and ridges. The plant produces two forms. The most common form is the juvenile form. Juvenile leaves are usually 3 to 5 lobed and about three inches long. Adult plants develop ovate leaves and only mature plants produce the small greenish-white flowers. Seeds are contained in a black, berry-like fruit, which is poisonous.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: English ivy can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Small infestations can be hand dug or pulled. Dug or pulled plants should not be left on the ground as they may re-root and the area must be revisited to ensure no regrowth occurs. For ivy plants already in trees, the vines should be cut at waist height and the roots dug out or treated with herbicide (the portion of the vines in the tree can be left to die). The waxy coating on the leaves often prevents herbicides from penetrating the plant. Cut stump treatment, therefore, is often used. Contact the weed control board for site-specific chemical recommendations.



Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board
 • 901 W. Smith Road • Bellingham, WA 98226
 • 360/354-3990

<http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pubwks/noxious/noxious.htm>



Master Composter/ Recycler Training begins March 20

Join other trained volunteers and help educate our community about home composting, recycling and resource conservation when you become a **Master Composter/Recycler**. Each year, WSU Whatcom County Cooperative Extension offers these classes to help local residents help each other prevent waste.

Class members learn about composting, build a worm bin, find out about recycling in Whatcom County, and visit interesting compost and recycling facilities. This training is important, since much of what we "throw away" could be easily recycled, or composted and returned to enrich the land—rather than buried in a landfill!

Training and supplemental materials are free. In return, each volunteer pays back 40 hours of volunteer time with educational outreach programs.

Classes are on Wednesdays, 7 – 9 PM, from **March 20 - April 24**, and include four Saturday AM field trips. To sign up, call WSU Whatcom County Cooperative Extension at (360) 676-6736 or e-mail: joycej@coopext.cahe.wsu.edu. Website: <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/compost>

Compost, because a rind is a terrible thing to waste.

Garden Friends and Foes By Todd Murray

MG Lake Whatcom Crane Fly Survey 2002

- ◆ Did you know that homeowners around the Puget Sound spent an estimated \$13 million on home use pesticides for crane fly control in 1999?
◆ Did you know that Diazinon and Dursban, two commonly used insecticides for crane fly problems, were found in rainwater going into Lake Whatcom?
◆ Did you know that Diazinon and Dursban have been banned by the EPA for home use?
◆ Did you know that crane fly problems are not very common?
◆ Did you know that Whatcom County Master Gardeners made this discovery?
◆ Do you want to help Lake Whatcom residents determine their crane fly problems (or lack of)?



If so, keep on reading and come help Lake Whatcom residents learn about crane flies while protecting our drinking water!

What? The MG crane fly survey was a pilot project last year that new master gardeners used to earn volunteer hours. This project was developed by Scarlet Tang and Todd Murray in order to address water issues in Lake Whatcom. Two courageous volunteers (see Weeder's Digest Sept. 2001) sampled 45 lawns for crane fly larvae in the Lake Whatcom watershed. This year, we would like to expand the survey to 100 lawns and we need your help.

The survey will involve pairs of MG's going out to homes in Lake Whatcom neighborhoods and doing standardized sampling for crane fly larvae using the "Lindsay crane fly sampler" developed by our own Sharon Lindsay (2001). Prior to the sampling day, we will have a training session. Visit the crane fly website http://whatcom.wsu.edu/cranefly to see what's involved in sampling crane flies.

When? Pending on how many homeowners and MG's we can round up, we plan on designating March 16th and/or March 23rd as the official MG Crane Fly Survey Day.

Where? We plan on meeting in the morning of the chosen Saturday at Blodel-Donavan Park.

Trees for Streams . . .

A TREE GIVE-AWAY!

Healthy Streams . . .



Neighbor to Neighbor . . .

EVERY SATURDAY IN FEBRUARY

9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Pick up at the corner of Prairie and Benson

FREE 2-3 foot Douglas fir trees for planting along your streams and rivers.

These trees have been grown for two years by Edaleen Dairy. Help will be provided to dig, wrap, and load your vehicle. Written planting instructions will be available.

Made possible by the Whatcom Agriculture Preservation Committee, representing your local farmers. Labor provided by the Meridian High School FFA.

For information and large orders: 360/398-9187

Why? Pesticide applications to manage crane flies can be an unnecessary risk to ground/drinking water, people, fish, birds and other wildlife. Most homeowners are applying insecticides that are not needed. By surveying homes in the Lake Whatcom watershed, we can educate Whatcom County residents about effective crane fly management and reduce the over all pesticide use.

How? Please contact Todd Murray at tamurray@coopext.cahe.wsu.edu or 676-6736.

Enlist a Lake Whatcom Homeowner Now!

If you or someone you know lives in the Lake Whatcom watershed, please be a participant in our survey. We will soon have many ways for Lake Whatcom residents to sign up for the survey. Visit http://whatcom.wsu.edu/cranefly regularly to find an on-line registration form or contact Todd for details.

Garden of Weeden Reed Canary Grass



Reed canary grass, (*Phalaris arundinaceae*) is a tall, 1.5m, aggressive, rhizomatous, colony forming perennial common in wet areas. It is the one invading species that is responsible for good salmon habitat degradation. Where streamside vegetation has been removed, canary grass takes over. It does not withstand shade, which is also necessary for good for salmon habitat. Although plants produce seeds, encroachment is generally by rhizomes from ditch banks and other wet areas. Rhizomes can also spread when topsoil or sand is transported from riverbanks.

Leaves are rolled in bud. Stems appear bluish-green. Blades are flat and rough along margins but lack hairs. Flowers and seed are produced by August. The seed head is a dense, branched panicle. Distinctive pale straw-colored seed heads extend well beyond the leaves. Although the seed heads are initially compact, the branches spread as they mature. Seeds are shiny, yellow to brown, with a hairy stalk attached to the base.

By Richard Steele Canary grass is found throughout the northern United States and Canada.

Garden Miscellany

Continued from page 2

Compost is black gold. The benefits of using compost in the garden is well known to most gardeners. Where compost is incorporated in the garden soil, flowers and vegetables alike, flourish noticeably better. If you are in the dark about composting and the benefits of it, contact Ms. Joyce Jimerson at the Extension Office. I even suggest that most new gardeners could benefit by taking the excellent compost classes, which are offered through the WSU/Whatcom Cooperative Extension.

Plant of the Month

Continued from page 4

between for the middle, thank goodness. All are hardy here and appreciate our cool summers. They do best in full sun and they're not overly particular about soil or water although of course they'll look their best when planted in a well-prepared site with good drainage, and watered regularly. Few pests or diseases bother these shrubs; they can withstand even pollution without ill effects and are therefore suited to streetside sitings.

Your most serious dilemma might be choosing the *Weigela* that's right for you. There are plenty to be seen at garden centers, in catalogs, and on the Web. You can even start with www.weigela.com! Once you've made your choice, plant it in a sunny location, give it sensible garden care, and prune it by as much as one-third right after it blooms. And learn from my mistakes...do remember to give it room to grow. Yes, it *will* match the description written on the tag, and sooner than you might think. Take my word for it...

Greenhouse Report

By Richard Steele

We have recently transplanted about 300 Fuchsia cuttings that were taken from hardy plants. We are trying to convert to perennials for the sale rather than those types that are normally found in stores. We will be starting some perennial seeds in February, followed by tomato seeds in March. We are also checking out the greenhouse at the Technical College for possible use next year.



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.

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 WHATCOM COUNTY

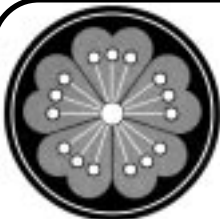
Master Gardener Office:
 Courthouse Annex 1000 N. Forest St.
 Bellingham, WA 98225 360/676-6736


 Craig MacConnell
 Horticulture Agent

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**MASTER
GARDENER**

Dates to Remember:

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--|
| February 14 | 7 to 9:30 p.m. | Monthly Foundation Meeting
Extension Office |
| February 15 | 8 a.m. 4:30 p.m. | MGF Advanced Training
Bellingham Technical College |
| March 2 | 9 a.m. to Noon | Grafting Workshop
Tennant Lake Interpretive Center |
| March 26 | 9 a.m. to Noon | Plant Diagnostic Clinic
Central Lutheran Church |
| 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 |