

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

March 2002



We have all been saddened and concerned to see Al McHenry's health deteriorate in the past few months. Recently Al has taken a leave from his position as the Whatcom County Master Gardener Coordinator due to these health issues. I know that we all wish him a speedy and thorough recovery.

I have been very grateful for a number of MG volunteers who have come forward to help make sure the Master Gardener program continues to operate in Al's absence. As we are just about ready to start our new volunteer training program, this need is more critical now than other times in seasons of our volunteer program. I am also very appreciative of the leadership of the Whatcom County Master Gardener Foundation for not only their concern about the continuity of the program, but their strong willingness to pitch in and help during this time of need.

There are a large number of opportunities to help the MG program right now as we start the training in anticipation of the gardening season and the inquires from the public that stimulates. If you would like to help, please contact me, Jill Cotton, Pat Nelson, Bill Baldwin, or other members of the foundation board.

Craig MacConnell

Yearly Plant Sale

~Richard Steele

To all members: We need donations of plants over the next couple of months. Any perennials or biennials that can be subdivided will be very welcome. Please bring what you have potted in plastic pots. Several sizes are available at the Hovander greenhouse. Please don't leave unpotted materials!! The greenhouse gang is so busy at this time of year that unpotted plants will languish. Following are some examples of the types that we need, but is by no means complete:

Hosta, Corydalis, Crocosima/Montbretia, Perennial geraniums, Lilys, Lychnis species, Iris (all types), Ladies mantle, Astilbe, Echinacea, Bergenia, Campanula species, Coral bells, Penstemons, Helleborus, Sage, Euphorbia (all types), Dusty miller, Mints, Leopard's bane, Perennial poppies, and any other beautiful plants that you would like to share. Walk around your yard and check what you have an excess of.

Wanted: Plant Sale Assistant

Seeking Master Gardener(s) with moderate to good organizational skills; ability to contribute volunteer hours once a year in a lump sum; enjoys plants, people and a day or two of festivities.

If this sounds like some of your attributes — call me. I'm searching for a *plant sale coordinating assistant* (or assistants) to share the numerous small tasks and details of the Plant Sale with. None of these tasks are difficult but need to be completed for a smooth running sale. Please call... thanks. **Christine Michaelis 734-1273**

Note: The Sale this year is May 11. Please reserve Friday and Saturday of this week to help out!

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Newsletter Deadline:

Third Wednesday of every month.

Garden Miscellany

By John VanMiert

Spring is here because we all can observe the readiness of the flowering plums, forsythia, and many others to show their blossoms. Daffodils are ready to flower, and tulips are popping up and will soon follow, too. Yes, I noticed weeds springing up in many gardens, lawns that needed mowing. All these are the familiar signs of the beginning of a new season. However, frost is still a possibility and not unusual in March for our area.

Final pruning: Complete the entire late spring pruning of fruit trees, raspberries and ornamentals and any other shrubs that need early spring pruning or shaping. Now is a good time for pruning summer blooming clematis. However, do not prune spring blooming plants now, but wait until after flowering is finished. Too many times we see, even professional landscape maintenance crews, pruning flowering plum trees just when they are starting to bloom. Roses should have their final pruning now too.

Spraying: Don't forget to apply the last of your winter dormant (Lime and Sulfur) spray. If you had a problem last year with Mildew or Blackspot on your roses begin an early spray program! Look for an approved fungicide, and adhere to the recommended use application as mentioned on the label. Remember, the **LABEL IS THE LAW**. We, Master Gardeners, should always point out the importance of these labels to our clients.

Planting and transplanting: March is the time to sow some varieties of perennials and cool weather vegetables directly into the prepared planting area. Other seeds that take 70–90 days to bloom can be seeded into cold frames. It is high time to plant evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs, if planted "Bare root". Before planting your newly acquired garden additions, special care should be taken if there is a drainage problem. Start tuberous begonias around the middle of March to provide plants to be ready for setting out in June. The slow hardening off of geraniums and fuchsias should begin now. Many bedding plants can be seeded indoors for outdoor planting in May/June. Dig up, divide, and replant crowded clumps of summer and fall blooming perennials such as ornamental grasses, chrysanthemums, coral-bells, etc. However, leave spring blooming perennials alone until next fall. Set out strawberry plants now. Try to obtain only certified plants to save you the disappointment of diseases. Many times the new starts, donated by well-meaning friends or others, are infected with certain diseases.

Fertilizing: Roses appreciate a fertilizer application monthly from now through the season with a 5–10–5-ratio fertilizer, or a balanced systemic rose fertilizer that is easier to use, because it eliminates the use of spraying to protect your roses from aphids and other pests. Fertilize newly planted roses after their first flowering. Applying fertilizer on your June-bearing strawberries in the spring results in excessive formation of leaves and runners, and produces less fruit. It is important to fertilize June bearing strawberries in late summer (August) to promote maximum fall growth and flower bud formation.

Rhubarb plants will respond to an application of high nitrogen fertilizer in mid March. Rhubarb plants require rich soil, and need to be well supplied with moisture. Propagation is easily done in spring by dividing established clumps; each piece should have at least one "eye".

Lawn care: The lawn care season begins by the middle of the month. Yes, it's time to check that lawnmower again, because mowing is usually needed by the middle of March. Correct any drainage problems, de-thatch if needed, seed or sod a new lawn, top dress and reseed bare spots in established lawns. Fertilize lawns if you have not done so in November (fall). Do not over-fertilize a lawn, which is easy to do. The surplus will just be a waste, and might even run off and pollute water sources. In planning and making a new lawn keep in mind that it is a long-time proposition, and that a good foundation (including drainage, soil texture and food supply) is essential in providing a happy home for the grass plants. This calls, sometimes, for artificial drainage if necessary, thorough preparation of the soil, and ample supply of organic matter, grading which is artificially effective as well as practical from the point of view of upkeep, and the use of a good seed mixture and plenty of it. A lawn seed mixture of 50% turf-type ryegrass and 50% small fescue is recommended for our area and usually very satisfactory.

Compost and other organic matter: If the soil is not too wet and not too cold, then you can start spreading your compost pile(s) or other organic materials in your perennials bed and vegetable areas. Working in a too wet soil results in heavy clumps, and these are very hard to mend in a suitable seedbed. So, don't be in a hurry. You will be happily surprised to see the results of using a well-finished compost or any decayed manure in the garden. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of incorporating organic matter in the vegetable and perennial gardens. All your other TLC will not give you the same satisfaction as an application of a good, prepared, finished compost.

Good gardening to all of you.



President's Message



Pat Nelson,
MGF President

February can be, and was, a month of anticipation! The Foundation meeting with talk of greenhouses, the grafting workshop, and the new class — followed the next day by our trip to the Seattle Flower and Garden Show!! Who could not get Spring fever!!

Getting back to reality—the Foundation has been quite affected by Al McHenry's illness. Our thoughts go out to Al and his family. Get well Al!! We are doing our best to fill in for him during his absence. Bill Baldwin & Jill Cotton will be coordinating the class for the trainees. We are counting on help from our veterans—so call if you can give us some time!!

Also, Billie Lockwood fell and fractured her shoulder and will be out of commission for a while. Hurry back Billie—we miss you!

At the meeting, Dick Steele told us about a large greenhouse that we can have for the removing. It would take work and money to move it, set it up, repair it and finally—run it! If you are interested in being on a greenhouse committee, call Dick.

Jean Powell brought the new M.G. t-shirts and sweatshirts to the meeting...and sold quite a few—they are irresistible!—*but a warning—don't wear them in public unless you are ready to answer questions about gardening!!*

It was suggested that M. G. veterans do 10 hours of volunteer work and 5 hours of training per year to stay on the mailing list. So, as you can see, there are lots of things to talk about and decisions to be made. If you have any questions or opinions, come to the board meeting at 10:30 a.m. on March 8.

Another bonus for February was the Advanced Training seminar. It was well attended by Master Gardeners from Whatcom and Skagit counties and British Columbia. Much applause for the wonderful job done by Merrilee Kullman—she also brought in our new M.G. coffee mugs and sold them along with our sweatshirts!

See you at our next Foundation on March 14, and remember—March is a very green month—St. Pat's day [my patron saint's day] and the first day of Spring!!!



Master Gardener Shirts

~Jean Powell

At last our "Master Gardeners are Down to Earth" sweatshirts and T-shirts have arrived and have been selling like hot-cakes! Both shirts feature the WA State insect (dragonfly) and state flower (rhodie). The shirts come in sizes Medium through XXX-Large. The cost is: Tees - Medium to X-Large are \$8.20; XX-Large are \$9.70 and XXX-Large are \$10.20. Sweatshirts - Medium to X-Large are \$14.30; XX-Large are \$16.30 and XXX-Large are \$17.30. While several sizes of the tees sold out almost immediately, more have been ordered and are now available. At the present time these shirts are stored in rather large, unwieldy and heavy boxes that are cumbersome to tote around. However, there will always be a limited number of shirts available to buy at Master Gardener functions. If you would like to ensure the availability of your size at a particular upcoming event, please contact me at 360/384-8023 or e-mail - powell@nas.com. Thank you.



Class of 2001:

If you have not received your name badge or graduation certificate, please stop by the office and pick them up. We cannot mail them due to breakage. Thanks!

Plant of the Month By Cheryll Greenwood Kinsley

Heavenly Bamboo

*Nandina domestica***Family:** Berberidaceae
(Barberry family)**Genus:** *Nandina***Species:** *domestica*

Heavenly Bamboo—*Nandina domestica*—has to be near the top of any list of desirably attractive, easy-to-care-for, mid-sized shrubs for the Pacific Northwest home garden. It's been a favorite of commercial plantspeople for years and is a long-standing staple for the home landscape in many areas. I understand that Heavenly Bamboo was one of the most popular plants at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show in Seattle last month. And deservedly so. The semi-evergreen, delicate foliage of most varieties of this hardy plant shows different colors every season—pinkish in the spring, then fresh, light green, then bronzy purple in the fall and bright crimson in winter. Large clusters of creamy or pinkish white blossoms appear in late spring, followed by showy red berries.

The largest variety of *Nandina domestica* grows to 8 feet tall and can spread as wide over a number of years. The smallest—'Wood's Dwarf' and 'Harbour Dwarf' among them—grow only to 18 inches and can be used as edgers or ground covers. Several excellent selections are available in the middle range, topping out at 3 to 4 feet with an equal width. All varieties do well here in full to part sun, with reasonable care and regular if not extravagant amounts of water. *N. domestica* is one of the few choices for the dry, dappled shade under evergreen conifers, although such placement will usually result in less brilliantly colored foliage. Judicious annual pruning—the removal of as many as a third of the plant's cane-like stems each spring—is recommended even if size isn't a factor, just to keep the plant from becoming untidily sparse at the bottom. Remember to use thinning cuts. Don't try to shear *N. domestica* into a formal hedge. If you choose to plant your Heavenly Bamboo in groups, leave these graceful plants to their free and flowing form and take visual advantage of their lovely light and open presence in your border.

The foliage of *Nandina domestica* is reminiscent of that of the family of giant grasses known collectively as bamboo, but there is no botanical relationship between them. Heavenly Bamboo is related to another family entirely and has a genus all its own—and a species, as well, since there is only one species in its single genus. So when correctly labeled, all specimens will have three components appearing in their names: genus (*Nandina*), species (*domestica*) and variety (many, including 'Firepower', 'Umpqua Princess', 'Alba', and 'Compacta'). For those who study plant nomenclature, you'll recognize this as a trinomial. We can veer further into the more-than-some-of-you-want-to-know Department by pointing out that all genus and species names must be in Latin or Greek. *Nandina* is a New Latin word, constructed from the Japanese *nanten*, which in turn was derived from the Chinese *nan* (south) and *tian* (heaven). *Zhu*, for bamboo, was converted into the western *a* to formulate an entirely new descriptor that, while Latin, was never used by the Romans, even if they had ventured far enough to reach into the East Asian native habitat of *Nandina domestica*, the place where it was first collected in the 18th Century.

Gardeners heave a sigh of relief when they learn that *Nandina domestica* is not related to bamboo, thinking that they've chosen a plant that isn't invasive. But as Master Gardeners, it behooves us to remain aware of what can happen when plants escape the confines of our own backyards, and consider all the ways in which plants can be "invasive." Think purple loosestrife. Think ivy. Many people are now choosing not to plant *Nandina domestica* because it's turned out to like its adopted home in the Western hemisphere all too well. The State of Florida carries it in Category I of its list of plants that are invading and disrupting native plant communities. The introduction to their list states, *This definition does not rely on the economic severity or geographic range of the problem, but on the documented ecological damage caused.* The US Forest Service has classified *Nandina domestica* as a Category 2 threat in the forests of the southeastern regions of the United States. It is not on any lists here, yet, or at least none of which I'm aware. But *Nandina domestica*, as attractive and as useful a landscape ornamental as it may be, is in fact an invasive plant pest in some areas of the country. *Proper berry management*—a serious sounding version of "get them before the birds do" is suggested as a precaution. The single most important thing we can do as responsible stewards is to remain aware and ever mindful that what we do in our gardens—and outside of them, as well—has an impact on something else, somewhere. We're each of us responsible for making the most informed choices we can make. Me, I still have three Heavenly Bamboo plants in my yard. But I'll be beating the birds to the berries and letting others know in presentations, that the case of *Nandina domestica* reminds us that "invasiveness" has a meaning more broad than one bamboo rhizome uprooting a driveway.

Weed of the Month By Laurel Shiner

Fragrant Water Lily

Nymphaea odorata

THREAT: Fragrant water lily is an aquatic plant, native to the eastern United States, which has been introduced to Washington as an ornamental plant. This floating-leafed plant can form dense mats, which interfere with recreation, water movement, and native plants and animals. Mats of fragrant water lily can completely cover the surface of shallow lakes. The mats of plants can cause a reduction in the oxygen content in the water, affecting fish. Fragrant water lily reproduces by seed and by rhizomes, which can produce new plants if broken off from the parent plant. The seed is spread by water currents and by waterfowl. Although wildlife will eat fragrant water lily, this benefit is far outweighed by the damage it does to the native lake species.

DESCRIPTION: Fragrant water lily is an aquatic perennial with floating leaves. It will root in water up to 6 feet deep and has a large, spreading root system. The leaves, which can grow up to 11 inches in diameter, are green on top; the undersides are purple to red, with numerous veins. The stem is attached to the center of the circular leaves, with a deep cleft to the stem in the leaf. The leaves and stems die back in the winter and new growth is produced by the root system each spring. The nursery industry has developed many flower color variations for this plant, however the strain which has naturalized in Washington has white (sometimes pink) flowers. The many-petaled flowers are large and showy, blooming from June to September. As the name implies, the flowers are very fragrant. Native Americans in the eastern U.S. used fragrant water lily for both food and medical purposes. The similar aquatic plant called spatterdock (also called yellow pond or cow lily) has yellow, ball-shaped flowers and leaves in the shape of elephant ears.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Like all aquatic weeds, control is difficult and eradication may be unrealistic. The best control is to prevent the introduction of any non-native aquatic plants to water bodies. Fragrant water lily can be controlled through mechanical (cutting, harvesting or rotovating) and chemical means. If plants are cut or rotovated, the plants and rhizomes should be removed from the water. Bottom barriers can also be used in small areas, to prevent rooted aquatic plant growth. Grass carp will not eat fragrant water lily. For site-specific chemical recommendations, contact the weed control board.



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 Food Preserver and Safety Advisor Training

Do you ever wonder what to do with all the wonderful fruits and vegetables you produce in your garden? The Master Food Preserver & Safety Advisor course trains volunteers in areas of safety and quality for all methods of home food preservation and provides a general background in food safety issues for the home kitchen. 40 hours will be in the classroom and 10 hours will be lab time. After completion of the course volunteers provide 50 hours of community service in a variety of volunteer roles including working a Food Safety Information Line, staffing information booths and teaching food preservation techniques to individuals and groups.

There will be an Orientation Meeting on Friday, March 15, at 9:30 a.m. at the WSU Whatcom County Cooperative Extension Office located at 1000 North Forest Street, Bellingham. Classes will be held at the Community Food Coop, 1220 N State Street, Bellingham, on Fridays from 9:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

If you are interested in joining our class, please call our office at 360/676-6736 for an application to be sent to you, or visit our website and apply online. Whatcom County Cooperative Extension has more information available regarding this program on their website at <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/family/mfpa/mfpa.htm>.

To Tea or Not to Tea

By Joyce Jimerson



There are many different opinions, and not many scientific facts regarding the use of compost tea. While anecdotal evidence and claims can be exciting, it's important to step back at times, to unearth what we really know and understand.

There have been many excellent scientific trials testing the effects of compost, which provides a good base for understanding compost tea.

What we DO know about **compost** is:

Compost is a great soil amendment. It:

- ◆ Improves soil structure, porosity & density—provides better root environment
- ◆ Loosens up clay soils for air & water
- ◆ Helps sandy soils retain water & nutrients
- ◆ Helps prevent runoff. Only a 5% increase in organic material quadruples soils water holding capacity.
- ◆ Makes any soil easier to work
- ◆ We also know compost:
- ◆ Adds essential nutrients & soil microorganisms
- ◆ May reduce incidence of plant diseases & other harmful organisms.

Compost is comprised of a very large & diverse community of microbes, humic acids, chemicals, which varies wildly from compost to compost. Different feedstocks, different methods (thermophillic vs. mesophillic vs. vermiculture) and different climates are just three variables that change the organic and chemical outcome of compost. Compost brings and feeds diverse life in the soil. We know that these bacteria, fungi, insects, worms, chemicals, humic acids and more support healthy plant growth.

Although not a fertilizer, compost does have a positive, cumulative effect on soil nutrient levels. Whatever nutrients are present in the soil become more bioavailable to plants growing in soils with added compost.

There have been many studies that support all of these benefits of compost. There is also recognition that different composts can affect different crops in very different ways.

Compost tea research is more recent. Again—it has been documented that compost tea has a very large & diverse community of organisms, depending on the compost, method of brewing and temperature, among other factors.

While there have been some scientific studies which show a positive effect on certain crops, there are also some studies which show a negative or no effect on certain crops. Some of these studies suggest that the effects are nutritive; others suggest that there may be some disease suppressive qualities in certain compost teas. On the compost website (<http://www.whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/compost/>), links to some of these studies and discussions are under the “Compost Uses” section. These include a link to an Organic Farming Research foundation Information bulletin which includes a review of recent literature along with several controlled experiments, a review of compost tea trials on the **Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) site**, and an article by Linda Chalker-Scott of the University of Washington discussing some “myths” of compost tea. In the “Research and Publications” section, a published study designed by IPM Manager, Todd Murray, in cooperation with Cascade Cuts Nursery, “Brewing up Solutions to Pest problems” describes the trials and outcomes of compost tea on basil.

Some people have tried inoculating compost teas with specific beneficial organisms. While this may help, it is still hard to be consistent, since those beneficial organisms need the right environment to maintain high populations in the brew. In general, the effects of inoculants are very short lived as the native, adapted organisms quickly reclaim their niches within the system.

There is also a controversy over whether compost teas should be produced with or without aeration. Much of the literature refers to this as “anaerobic” vs. “aerobic” teas. Teas without aeration are made with placing compost in a permeable “bag” soaking it in water for 24 to 48 hours. Teas with aeration are made with air bubbling through the compost tea mix continually, and take less time to brew. Again, although many people support the “aerated” approach, saying that those active systems push the beneficial microbes out of the feedstock & into the tea, a number of studies and researchers suggest that anaerobic teas may actually have greater disease suppressive capabilities.

Continued on next page



Lake-Friendly Gardening

a free workshop series

Saturdays 10:00 - noon
Bloedel-Donovan Park Pavilion

Celebrate spring by picking up some tips about keeping your lawn and garden healthy—all while protecting Lake Whatcom water quality! Come to a series of free workshops led by local experts on health care for your lawn and garden.

April 6	Groundcovers: Alternatives to Turf
April 13	Lakescaping
April 20	Managing Pests Safely & Effectively

r s v p: 676-6736
or scarlet@coopext.cahe.wsu.edu





To Tea or Not to Tea

Continued from Page 6

The USDA has some concern over human health issues. They do not encourage people who are growing uncooked edible foods to spray with compost tea, due to the possibility of inoculating food with e-coli, or other harmful pathogens possibly living in the compost tea mixture.

Confused? So are most of the rest of us! What we DO know is:

Right now, the community dynamics of compost tea is not understood or currently controllable. Thus, using it as a reliable amendment is difficult since benefits are contributed through many factors (chemical, nutrient, microbiological) instead of known active ingredients.

Hopefully, as we do more research we can provide this information to folks interested in the technology, so they can make good choices.

So, despite all the hype, compost tea is not the silver bullet everyone is looking for. Unfortunately, nature is not that simplistic. But it's fun to experiment. (I do lots!) If you do experiment, and come up with a formula that you think works—try replicating it in a scientific way, and let us know the results!

Reminder:

If you're interested in learning how to make good compost, visiting interesting facilities and teaching others the craft—Master Composter/Recycler classes start Wednesday, March 20, 7-9 p.m.



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

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.





Craig MacConnell
Horticulture Agent

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**MASTER
GARDENER**

Dates to Remember:

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|--|
| March 14 | 7 to 9:30 p.m. | Monthly Foundation Meeting
Extension Office |
| March 2 | 9 a.m. to Noon | Grafting Class
Tennant Lake Interpretive Center |
| March 16 & 23 | | Crane Fly Survey Days |
| 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 |