

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

November 2002

Don't forget to attend the Graduation /Potluck at the Ferndale Senior Center on November 7. It is always a fun event. Bring guests (kids included) and your favorite dish to share. We will also announce the results of the election. Even if you have not completed all of your hours please come and share a good time.

There are many on-going activities that are being worked on all through the winter. There are committees working on advanced training, a new demonstration garden at Bloedel-Donovan Park, volunteer activities, garden trips, etc. So, if you would like to participate in planning any of these or other activities, join up and give us your ideas!

Thanks to all of you who volunteered this year, but we need you to record that time on a sheet of paper (any kind) and submit it to the office.

Good Harvesting, see you at the Graduation!

Al McHenry

Cover Crops

~Adapted from "The Little Miracles Performed by Cover Crops" by Lee Reich

Cover crops are plants traditionally grown to prevent soil erosion, conserve nutrients and improve tilth, but they also present exciting alternatives to weeding, hauling mulch, even fertilizing.

A dense growth of cover crops can quell weeds by shading them, and cover crops like rye and oats release weed-suppressing chemicals into the soil. And, cover crops can provide organic materials that gardeners would otherwise have to gather or buy and then spread as mulch.

Cover crops help nourish other plants by pulling in nutrients from the air and from deep within the soil and rendering them in a usable form.

Cover crops can do even more. After they die, their rotting roots leave behind channels for water and air. Some cover crops are good at breaking up compacted layers of soil. Some, like buckwheat, attract beneficial insects. And finally, a dense stand of plants simply looks prettier than bare soil.

The right cover crop can even look decorative among other ornamental plants. The show from crimson clover – its blossoms clustered tightly on upright stalks like strawberry popsicles – is so spectacular that you would hardly suspect that it was improving the soil. Most plants used for cover crops are grasses or legumes. Grasses are valued for their extensive roots. It's estimated that 385 miles of roots lie beneath a single rye plant. Legumes' roots are less extensive but harbor microorganisms that enrich the soil with nitrogen taken from the air.

There's no single best way to use a cover crop. All sorts of possibilities exist if you study specific cover-crop plants and then experiment.



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Newsletter

Deadline:

Third Wednesday of every month.

Tis the Season



By Faye Agner

October has been a dry month with lower night temperatures and very enjoyable days. A lovely Indian summer. This has been one of the driest Octobers on record.

November is the time for fall clean up in the garden. The autumn leaves were brightly colored and a treat to see. As they fall to the ground, it reminds us that fall/winter is near. Leaves need to be raked and disposed of, ideally in a compost pile. In spite of the mild, dry weather it is time to prepare the garden for the winter season.

Removal of all debris in the garden is an important way to keep ahead of slugs for the following spring. You can be sure that you will find slugs' eggs under all piles of left-over garden debris. Favored places for hiding their eggs is under old boards.

All cut down plant material should be gathered and put in your compost pile/bin. All rotting fruits, vines from squash and pumpkins, tomato plants, weeds of all kinds and leaves may be composted. Exceptions should be made for diseased plant material like apple scab, late blight of tomatoes and others. Also, apples that were infested with apple maggot should be kept out of the compost. Go to <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/compost/mrcpubs.htm> to read a fact sheet on disposing of apples infested with apple maggot. Better to get rid of all diseased and maggot infested materials by other means than composting.

It is time to dig and store tender bulbs. This includes dahlias and glads. This little chore needs to be cared for before the heavy frosts settle in. Tuberos begonias should have reduced watering. As the leaves turn yellow and fall off, lift the tubers, shake off soil, and dry in a cool, dry spot for several days. Now they are ready for storage in a cool, dry place such as a shed or garage until spring when pink buds appear, and it is time to plant the tubers once again.

It is not too late for planting spring-flowering bulbs. Plant bulbs in an organic-rich soil; compost is ideal for adding to the planting bed. Enrich soil with bulb food or super phosphate. Most spring-flowering bulbs are winter hardy, but it's a good idea to put a layer of peat moss over the planting area. The best time for that is after some freezing weather, the purpose being to keep the planting soil cooler and delay the too early showing of the new growth.

Tender loving care of all your perennials is important. The last of the season's herbaceous perennial flowers-asters and chrysanthemums- might bloom through November. Chrysanthemums should be cut back to within six inches of the ground. If they look crowded, it may be good to divide them. Dividing can best be done in the spring. It is good practice, after cutting down, to mulch the plants and all other perennials with a good mulch like compost, leaf mold, peat moss, manure etc. Perennial stalks should be cut down to 4" or 5" above the ground. An exception is ornamental grasses, which add winter interest and can be cut back in the spring.

Hydrangeas, cultivars of *Hydrangea macrophylla*, are called 'changeable'. This is because their flowers change from pink to blue or vice versa. The key to changing the color lies in the pH (degree of acidity) of the soil. To create colors of your choosing, or to intensify a color that's already there, test your soil, and amend it at the end of the growing season. Be patient, it can take a year for the colors to change. Hydrangeas are in the pink as the soil's pH approaches the range of 7 to the slightly higher numbers of alkaline soil. If you want vivid pink flowers, add hydrated lime to the soil at the rate of 1 Tablespoon per plant, or as needed, to adjust its pH to between 6 and 7. You'll have to check your soil pH every few months, and add lime to keep the pH below 7. For the blues, the range of 4.5 to 6 on the pH scale is needed. To turn the hydrangea flowers blue, dissolve ¼ ounce of aluminum sulfate in a gallon of water, and apply it once in spring and again in fall.

Continue lawn care by keeping your lawn cut going into winter. Rake fallen leaves regularly off the grass. Leaves will smother the grass. A feeding in November will keep lawns green and nourish the roots during the wintertime. Remember, if you plan on fertilizing only once a year, November is the best time to do so. Applying some dolomite lime this time of the year could be very beneficial too. Beware, don't apply nitrogen fertilizer and lime at the same time!

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President's Message



Pat Nelson,
MGF President

Ah yes, October was just as I hoped it would be—beautiful! It is hard to believe that October and November are both Fall—they are so different. However, here we are—facing November. Oh, it will be great!

October started out with a strategic planning with Craig and Al. It was a good meeting. One of the subjects that we focused on was minimum veteran volunteer and training hours (check Weeder's Digest, April 2002). It was observed that the veteran volunteer part of it just wasn't working. We decided that we would join the rest of the counties in Washington and initiate minimum veteran volunteer and training hours in order to continue as an active member of the Foundation. See the Strategic Planning Update for more details.

At our foundation meeting, we talked about a new program that Craig is working on at Bloedel Donovan Park. We have been asked to help with a demonstration garden there. It is just in the planning stages, so expect to hear more later.

We had a very interesting talk given by Vic Gould about his involvement in different areas of horticultural therapy and how it led him to the Master Gardener program at Lake Whatcom Treatment Center. Dianne Rapoza talked about her involvement too. It is a wonderful program that needs more Master Gardeners to volunteer. Call Vic or Dianne for further information.

Strategic Planning Update

At October's MG Foundation meeting, a motion was unanimously passed changing our bylaws. Beginning in 2003, veteran Master Gardeners will be required to complete and report 25 hours of volunteer time and 5 hours of continuing education per year. Up until this time, Whatcom was the only county in Washington not requiring veterans to complete volunteer hours. In the next newsletter, you will receive a checklist of volunteer opportunities. We would like you to indicate your areas of interest, so we can begin to plan our projects and schedule for the upcoming year.

Here's some exciting news—we received a check for \$1,000.00 from John VanMiert for our scholarship fund! THANK YOU JOHN!! It has really lit a fire under us! We now have a committee in place to establish the criteria required to be a recipient of a scholarship. So far we have John VanMiert, Cheryl Greenwood Kinsley, Merrilee Kullman, and Marla Morrow on board. We anxiously await a report from them! Thank you all!

About 20 of us M.G. girls had a great time at our wreath making class. JoAnne Roose showed a real easy way to make beautiful herb wreaths. Even mine wasn't bad for a first attempt!

Now—let me tell you—you don't want to miss graduation—it is going to be a trend setter! How you may ask? You'll just have to come and see! Remember; bring a main or side dish and a smile! See you at 6:00 p.m. on November 7, at Ferndale Senior Center!!!!

Thanks, Pat

Master Gardener Shirts

Now that cooler fall weather has arrived, I'm sure you're all wondering about the perfect gardening attire. Well, we've got just the thing for you. Our beautiful MASTER GARDENERS ARE DOWN TO EARTH sweatshirts are soft and cozy. They're made of 50% preshrunk cotton/ 50% polyester and are very reasonably priced. Sizes medium through X-large are only \$14.30. An XX-large is \$16.30 and the XXX-large is \$17.30. There will be a limited number of shirts available for purchase at the November graduation ceremony. If you would like to avoid the shivers and order a shirt, please contact me at 360/384-8023 or e-mail me at: powell@nas.com.

Thank you.....Jean Powell

Plant of the Month By Cheryll Greenwood Kinsley

Common Cattail

Family: Typhaceae (Cattail family)

Genus: *Typha*

Species: *latifolia*

This month's featured plant isn't one you're likely to find in your typical home garden. Big, brawny cattails aren't domesticated—they're more suited to expansive wetlands than they are to mixed borders.



We see them by the side of the road as we pass by, and most of us hardly give them a thought. They are a part of our natural landscape, these plants that some call weeds and others call "aquatic herbs." No less an authority than the Washington State Department of Ecology refers to cattail as "one of the most common and easily identified of our [Washington State native] water-loving plants." Go to <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/ecyhome.html> and you'll find a wealth of information about the value of *Typha latifolia* in keeping lakes healthy by filtering runoff and reducing shoreline erosion. Cattails also provide habitat for many types of wildlife and birds. And for centuries, they were a source of food, building material, and medicine for native peoples.

It was John Van Miert who drew my attention to cattails. Among his many talents is a particular penchant for observing what's around him, learning about it, and passing that knowledge along to others. Not too long ago I was treated to a glimpse of a fall bouquet assembled by John and Rosamonde, arranged to celebrate the season and featuring interesting seed pods. They began with the dramatic pods of Siberian iris and added a dried thistle or two, but they needed something else to serve as a standard, an upright stem to preside over the rest. So John drove out to Hovander and stopped along the way to cut **one** cattail flower spike. That did the trick. In a few days, the spike began to release its seeds in a pouf of fluff down, spilling out from the top, enveloping the brown spike in a halo of fluff. It was the very definition of "gossamer." What a lovely sight!

John knew this would happen, because years ago he made an arrangement of **several** cattail flower heads, in the fall, and set it in his living room. A few days later, someone opened the door to the outside, a gust of fall wind blew in—and the seeds, the substance of the gossamer, all 117,000 to 268,000 of them *per stalk*—drifted airily into every single corner of his house and made themselves at home. It took months to find them all and evict them from the premises. So now, he chooses only one stalk; and as soon as the pouf causes Rosamonde to sneeze for the very first time, out it goes, banished to the compost. He doesn't worry about the seeds catching hold and making nuisances of themselves in his yard, because the wet areas necessary for their survival are far, far away.

Cattails grow in Europe—they're found in arctic, temperate, subtropical, and tropical regions, throughout Asia and Africa, Central America, New Zealand, Australia, and Japan—so John had encountered them before. But he really started to study them after he moved to the United States in 1960. An avid hiker and a good planner, he learned that they were a food source in the woods in cases of emergency. He read about them in what he calls his most valuable source of Northwest native plant information, **Trees, Shrubs & Flowers to Know in Washington**, by C.P. Lyons, a book published in 1956. Mr. Lyons had a television show in the 1960s, as well, and John "met" him weekly by watching his presentations. An interesting sidelight is that Rosamonde, before she met John, had the very same book. She used it as a field guide and, wonderful writer that she is, put notations about her plant sightings next to each entry. That copy of the book, with her charming observations, remains in their library today.

John returns to Mr. Lyons's book often—it was updated in 1995 to **Trees, Shrubs & Flowers to Know in British Columbia & Washington**, and Bill Merilees joined C.P. Lyons as co-author. It remains one of the information sources he trusts the most, based on his own experience and years of accumulated knowledge. Another is **The Color Dictionary of Flowers and Plants**, authored by Roy Hay and Patrick M. Syngé and published in 1969. John finds this latter work invaluable when identifying cultivated plants. Newer garden books, in John's opinion, tend to offer less comprehensive and detailed information; and they are often not specific to our Pacific Northwest region. We have a particular set of horticultural

*Please join John and me at the graduation celebration dinner on November 7. I'll be sharing some of what I've learned from John in my presentation about garden trends, and he'll be there to help me answer your questions.
~Cheryll Greenwood Kinsley*

Garden Friends and Foes By Todd Murray

Pear Slugs and Fruit Trees

Order: Hymenoptera (bees, ants, wasps, sawflies, parasitoids)

Family: Tenthredinidae (common sawflies)

Species: *Caliroa cerasi* (pear slug)

Identification & Life History

What the heck is eating my fruit trees? Is it a snail? A slug? A freakish tadpole? It's a pear slug! This isn't your normal slug; in fact it isn't even a slug at all. It's the larva form of a sawfly.

Like all hymenopterans, sawflies have two pair of wings in the adult stage. Adult sawflies are different from other wasps and ants and bees because their abdomen is broadly joined to the thorax. All other members of hymenoptera have that characteristic constricted waist.



Pear slug larva. Note the feeding damage that is occurring. This very distinct damage is called "leaf skeletonization."

Pear slugs overwinter as a pupa. Adults emerge in spring to begin laying eggs. Adult sawflies are small (about 1/5 inch) shiny black flies. Females are equipped with a small ovipositor used to lay eggs but not sting people. Eggs are deposited into leaves. Upon hatching the newly emerged sawfly larva feeds on the upper surface of the leaves. Newly hatched larvae are yellow to green in color but soon turn slimy dark green, almost appearing black. This is what gives them their name: pear slugs. After the larvae fully develop, the larvae drop down to pupate in the soil. Soon after, adults emerge in August to do the whole thing over again. The second generation is much quicker and during warmer years there can even be a third generation.

Damage & Monitoring

The pear slug larvae feed on the upper surface of leaves causing very distinct damage. The upper epidermis and mesophyll layer of the leaf is removed during feeding while the lower epidermis layer of the leaf and the leaf veins are left intact. This gives the appearance of brown or silvery leaves and is referred to as leaf 'skeletonization.' Pear slugs do not limit themselves to just pears, but will attack other similar fruit trees. Pear slugs will feed on cherry, apple, plum, hawthorn and mountain ash trees. Damage can be seen on ornamental flowering trees and are not limited to fruiting types. Scout for damage to leaves in the late summer and beginning of the fall. Look for the slug-like larvae feeding on top of the leaf surface.



Adult Sawfly. Adults are about 1/5 of an inch long.

Management

Generally pear slugs do not become a pest. If they do, it isn't until the second generation. Even though damage may appear dramatically, there may be no need to treat for this pest. This is where you need to put on your old English horsehair wig and pass judgment on these pests. If your tree has a high infestation but the tree is showing signs of the fall season, then kick back and relax. Your tree will soon drop its leaves anyway and managing this pest is not necessary. By doing so, you are not dooming your tree to another infestation next year. High mortality can occur in the overwintering pupae. Make a note to yourself to monitor for pear slug activity next season. This is where keeping a garden journal is useful. I don't remember what I did yesterday let alone remember how many pear slugs where on my cherry tree last year. Keep a record of your observations; they will always be useful and maybe entertaining.

If your tree is carrying a high infestation of pear slugs and fall is a little further off, then you need to grab your old English gavel and start hammering the larvae. Handpicking pear slugs off small trees is your 100% effective treatment. If you don't want to do the dirty work by hand, try a forceful stream of water from you garden hose. For trees that are larger, you can resort to an insecticide. Do so only if you are sure that the pest is still present and feeding and has not dropped to the ground.

Pear slugs are wimpy and appear to be susceptible to about any insecticide. Be sure that the insect appears on the label or the host tree and uses are listed on the pesticide label. This is important to not confuse ornamental uses and edible fruit tree uses. If you look at the WSU recommendations, there very

Weed of the Month By Laurel Shiner

Reed Canarygrass

Phalaris arundinacea



THREAT: Native to Europe, reed canarygrass is a Class C Noxious Weed in Whatcom County. It is widespread and found on every major landmass except Antarctica and Greenland. It threatens wetland ecosystems, livestock, salmon, native plants and aggravates allergies in humans. Reed Canarygrass spreads easily by creeping rhizomes, vegetative fragments and seeds. It is frost tolerant and starts growth very early in the season, allowing it to outcompete desirable species. It grows in roadside ditches, rights-of-way, river dikes and levees, wetlands, meadows, riparian areas and other wet sites. Once Reed Canarygrass invades, diversity declines drastically. Reed Canarygrass does not provide shade and contributes to a rise in water temperature, which decreases habitat for salmon as well as other wildlife. This grass impedes water flow, increases siltation, and can lead to soil erosion. Although planted as a soil stabilizer and forage, it had been found to cause indigestion and illness in livestock. Reed Canarygrass produces copious amounts of pollen.



DESCRIPTION: Reed Canarygrass, a member of the grass family, typically thrives in areas that are saturated or nearly saturated for most of the growing season. It grows 3-6 feet tall, with sturdy hollow stems up to 1/2 inch diameter. Leaves are flat and hairless, coming off the stem at 45° angles. Inconspicuous flower clusters are borne on stems high above the leaves. Creeping rhizomes spread the plant and form a dense layer just below the soil surface.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Hand pulling is only practical for small or patchy distribution. Reed Canarygrass does not tolerate shade, so establishing desirable trees and shrubs may be a long-term goal. Covering with a fabric or plastic barrier will control, but not eliminate populations. Mowing, pulling, burning and chemical control may also be effective, especially used where native plants can re-establish. For site-specific chemical control recommendations, contact the Weed Control Board.

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board, 901 W. Smith Rd., Bellingham, WA 98226, (360) 354-3990

Hovander Happenings



David Simonson and helper's at Hovander's Pumpkin Day

October 19 was "Pumpkin Day" at Hovander Park and basically marked the end of the 2002 demonstration garden season. Although a bit of rain fell early, it turned out to be a fairly pleasant day.

We had a great turnout of Master Gardeners, fledglings and volunteers, to manage the function. It was particularly gratifying to have several Master Gardener families come out to assist with the pumpkin activity. We had several adult groups homes come for pumpkins and after 10 a.m. many children came to select a pumpkin. At noon, the leftover pumpkins were placed by the sale table and were available by donation. Of course, without mentioning, we had some wonderful pumpkins treats at our 10:30 break!

We had approximately 425 pumpkins in our patch this year! The largest was 175 pounds!

All in all, it was a most enjoyable year as your demonstration garden coordinator and I hope that many of this year's class will become veteran participants at the garden. We appreciate having you out to assist and share your expertise!

By David Simonson

coordinator and I hope that many of this year's class will become veteran participants at the garden. We appreciate having you out to assist and share your expertise!

Getting to Know...

Bill Baldwin

Bill has been a Master Gardener since 1997, first in Texas and since 2000 here in Whatcom County. Bill's primary activities with the Master Gardeners are his weekly office clinic hours and he is the treasurer for the Master Gardener Foundation. Bill and his wife, Dorothy, have four children and ten grandchildren and make their home in Bellingham's south side where he tends to his flowering annuals and perennials, but he tells us that his true passion is killing weeds!

Bill has a PhD in agronomy from Oregon State University and spent his career developing herbicides and insecticides before retiring. He spent a lot of time in China, specifically the upper Yangtze River area. Bill feels that he was able to effect a positive change in the agronomic habits of the area.

When not involved with the Master Gardeners, Bill is active with the Academy of Lifelong Learning, participating on their curriculum committee.

By Jill Cotton

'Tis the Season

Continued from page 2

In our mild climate, many kinds of mushrooms are very likely to appear in your garden and lawn. Mushrooms are interesting plants. The part you see is only the fruiting structure. The main body is below ground level, and it is called mycelium. This is a series of white threads growing in the organic material in the soil. They can be as deep as 8 inches. Mushrooms in lawns are hard to control. Some success may be obtained by watering heavily in the infested areas. When the fruiting bodies appear, don't let them develop spores. Use a strong stream from your garden hose to knock them over, or rake them up.

Plant of the Month

Continued from page 4

tural blessings and challenges here, requiring specific consideration and treatment. That's why it's a pleasure for me to work with John on **Garden Sense**, a compilation of his Garden Miscellany columns from the Master Gardener newsletter, augmented with questions he and I encounter frequently from gardeners in the area. We're working away on the book now, and we should have it ready for publication soon.

Alas, there will be little information about cattails in **Garden Sense**. But our book does emphasize the importance of observing one's surroundings and seeking out trustworthy and accurate sources of reliable information. Those two factors go a long way towards determining success in one's garden. John says so, and I always trust what John says. The only thing more remarkable than the depth and breadth of John's garden knowledge is his unstinting willingness to share it with others.

Garden Friends and Foes

Continued from page 5

extreme differences between the two types of trees. In fact, WSU does not recommend any chemical controls for pear slug on edible pear trees. Be sure to follow all cautions to avoid bee poisoning and do not spray insecticides during bloom, unless stated otherwise on the label. Although this data did not come from WSU Cooperative Extension, I have viewed data that shows diatomaceous earth and insecticidal soaps increase mortality of pear slug larvae. If you chose to experiment with these types of products, follow the label carefully. Test the product on just a few leaves first to be sure that there are no phytotoxic effects to your tree.



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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 Craig MacConnell
 Horticulture Agent

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**MASTER
GARDENER**

Dates to Remember:

November 7 6 to 9:30 p.m. **MG Graduation Potluck**
Ferndale Senior Center

Wednesdays 8 to 9 a.m. **Master Gardener breakfasts**
Babe's in Ferndale