

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

December 2002

From Everyone at Cooperative Extension HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

The Graduation/Potluck was a lot of fun and a great night! We had one of the largest turnouts ever. We need to thank David Simonson for a fine job as M.C. and every one thoroughly enjoyed Cheryl Greenwood Kinsley as the featured graduation speaker. We need more events such as this one.

You need to know that the Advanced Training will be held in **SEPTEMBER** for the upcoming (2003) year. There are so many scheduling conflicts in late January and all of February that we will try a Fall class. We hope this will be a better fit for every ones' busy schedule.

Some of the newly graduated Master Gardeners have not received their certificates. We have them in the office to be picked up for you newly certified gardeners.

We need volunteers to help with the bulletin packets for next year's class. We already have an inventory thanks to Luana, so we will put together the packets in early January. If you are interested in helping with this project please let me know.

ENJOY YOUR HOLIDAYS!

A Special Award

Believing that it was time to give some, well past due, recognition the Foundation has created an annual award and named it, appropriately, after the first year's recipient - that person being John VanMiert.

So, The John VanMiert Award - Master Gardener of the Year - came into being. The award plaque hangs in the master gardener office, and John received an engraved stainless steel spade for the honor.

John has been with the master gardeners since 1985 helping out in so many capacities it would cover many pages to elaborate upon. Suffice it to say, John has been our mentor, our resource, our inspiration, and indeed, our friend. One cannot but warmly smile, when thinking of him. So thank you, John, for being there for all of us.

Qualifications for The John VanMiert Award:

This award will be given annually to a person who has been a Master Gardener for at least three years. It is to be awarded for exemplary service to the Master Gardeners of Whatcom County and the community. John VanMiert has had so much influence on us all as a teacher, a writer, a speaker, a diligent worker, and a volunteer extraordinaire. Therefore, the service of the recipient of this award might be in the form of one or more of the following:

- a. TAUGHT a class, a workshop, a clinic, a course, seniors at a retirement home or kids on an outing.
- b. WRITTEN a book, a poem, an article, a newsletter column.

continued on page 7



INSIDE:

Tis the Season	2
MG Foundation	3
Plant of the Month	4
Garden Friends & Foes	5
Weed of the Month	6
General Information	7
Dates to Remember	Back Page

Newsletter Deadline:

Third Wednesday of every month.

Tis the Season



By Faye Agner

December is always an interesting month with its changeable weather, the holiday season and the beginning and ending of both indoor and outdoor chores. The weather has been different this year, even for Whatcom County. There has been an abundance of dry weather, an early cold snap, and now the wet season seems to have arrived.

With regard to a Christmas tree; if you are going to purchase a cut tree, remember that basically growers cut all the trees at the same time, so shop early for the best-looking tree. Select a full, symmetrical tree with supple needles that are blue-green or rich green. Brush the needles and shake the tree. If falling needles shower you feet, look further for your tree. When you get your tree home, cut off the bottom inch of the trunk, and plunge the trunk into a bucket of water. Keep the tree in a cool, shady place until you are ready to decorate it. A little bleach added to the water will kill bacteria that slow down the capillary action. A tree with good moisture levels will drink about 1 quart per inch of the diameter of the trunk. In other words, an average tree with a 4-inch trunk would drink about 2 to 4 quarts per day. If your stand does not hold at least a gallon of water, you might consider using a five gallon plastic bucket with rocks in the bottom to hold the tree upright.

If a living tree is your choice, there are many varieties from which to choose. You needn't confine yourself to a fir or hemlock. There are many interesting trees available that you might select with an eye to where they will fit in your landscape. Regardless of your choice, being indoors is hard on the living tree. Conditions are too hot and too dry. Place the tree in a container that will accommodate the root ball which needs to be kept evenly moist. When considering a living tree, remember to add a foot or two, so you have room for the root ball and the tree without having to cut off the top of the tree and perhaps ruining the tree's shape. Use small, cool lights, and save your heaviest decorations for the mantel. If the weather is very cold when you move the tree back out of doors, be sure to place it in a protected location for a week or so before planting. If your tree has a burlap ball, you do not need to remove the burlap, but be sure to loosen it. You may even want to cut through the fabric in several places. I know this is silly, but if your tree is in a container, be sure to remove the tree from the pot before planting.

Be sure to keep leaves and debris from your lawn and beds. They make ideal breeding places for slugs and the like. Leaves will smother the lawn if not removed.

After any heavy storm, assess any tree and shrub damage that may have occurred. If there is major damage, such as fallen limbs or trees, and you are not sure of the correct solution, call your friendly extension office, or talk with your nursery person. After a snow, grab a broom and walk your property. Shrubs that are completely buried with snow should be left alone. The same is true for leafless deciduous trees and most needle-leafed pines. Take action only if the trunk of the tree is badly bowed down (usually occurs with small trees). Gently shake the trunk to dislodge the snowy burden. Bounce the lower branches from underneath to relieve the most heavily stressed areas. Dense evergreens and shrubs are often deformed by heavy snow. Using the bristle end of your broom, gently bounce the middle of the branches from underneath. In the infrequent event of an ice storm, do nothing. The brittle coat formed by ice acts as both a load and a support. Let nature take its course.

If you have a husband like mine, hide the pruning shears, as pruning of the fruit trees and ornamental trees should be postponed till the end of January and February. A severe winter could do damage to pruning wounds. It's a good time for taking cuttings of many foliage plants for rooting in a propagation cold frame or a container indoors or for the lucky owners of a hobby greenhouse. It's late, but you can still have good results if you have to plant spring bulbs; enrich soil with bulb food, bone meal should be your first choice, and add some nitrogen on top of the planting bed early in February.

Now is a good time to reflect on the Chinese custom of paying all debts before the beginning of a new year. Pick up around your yard, care for any broken limbs due to wind damage, pick up leaves and debris that can hide slugs and their eggs. While you are in the cleaning mode, go through the chemicals and fertilizers in your potting area and discard all the out of date, empty, or nearly empty, containers in the manner suggested on the labels.

Have a happy and a safe holiday season, everyone!



President's Message



Pat Nelson,
MGF President

Bonsai Workshop

Our bonsai guru, Sharon Lindsay, has once again offered to lead us through a workshop in creating and caring for a bonsai plant. This workshop will be a bit more involved and detailed than the last one, because we will have more time. It will be held from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. on March 18, 2003 at the Cascade Gas building, 1600 Iowa Street in Bellingham. Soil, wire, pots, and plants will be provided. You will need to bring pruners, wire cutters, and your lunch. Enrollment is limited. The fee is \$25.00 for master gardeners and \$35.00 for non-master gardeners. Please send payment to Chris Hurst (366-5501) payable to MGF to reserve a spot.

It's hard to believe that I mowed my lawn in November and did some final garden cleanup too! What a wonderful gardening season we had! And now we welcome the rain! —and our new master gardener veterans!

Graduation was great, it's wonderful when so many people come that we ran out of chairs. The food was awesome, David Simonson MC'd like a pro. Well deserved awards were given out, Jill Cotton for all she did last year and continues to do in the office, Billy Lockwood for her many years of help at Hovander, and Dick Steele to welcome him back to active duty. Rod Tinamore [our state MG coordinator] gave us a report on state happenings, our own Cheryl Kinsley gave a great talk on gardening trends, and last but not far from least—The John VanMiert Award was handed out to its first very well deserving recipient—John VanMiert!!

The new board was introduced as follows—President, Pat Nelson; 1st vice president, Chris Hurst; 2nd vice president, Linda Bergquist; treasurer, Bill Baldwin; and Secretary, Elizabeth Bays. Congratulations to you all!

A big thanks to Dianne Rapoza and Marilee Wilcox for being our hospitality coordinators for this last year and a big welcome to Loretta Hogg and Kay Dykas who will be taking over for the coming year—and what a time to take over—December—lots of Christmas cookies!!

Our board meeting will be Thursday December 5 at 10 a.m. All are welcome to come and present many new exciting ideas to add to our Foundation meeting, which will be one week later—December 12 at 7pm. See you then!!

Next Meeting

Alison Kutz-Troutman will be our guest speaker at the foundation meeting on December 12. She has been in the horticulture industry for 25 years, primarily running Cascade Cuts Nursery with her husband Paul. With an interest in the environmental quality of plant and animal health, Alison has extended her work into the rapidly expanding area of microbiological solutions for sustainable and transitional agriculture. Sustainable agriculture practices are increasingly being viewed as the only practical, long-term approach to feeding the planet. As mainstream conventional food producers look for alternative solutions to their production issues, they are realizing that the key to their economic survival is the adoption of more sustainable methods. So, come join us for an enlightening, motivational, and philosophical discussion and exploration of where these two mindsets can meet, with the small market farmer and our community as beneficiaries.

Northwest Flower & Garden Show

It's nearly that time of year again for that wonderful flower show at the Seattle Convention Center. The master gardeners bus trip will be Wednesday, February 19th, 2003. We will leave from the REI parking lot in Bellingham at 8:00 AM and return between 9 and 9:30 PM. The cost will be \$20.00 for master gardeners and \$28.00 for your guests. To reserve your seat on the bus you must pay in advance. Please give your money to Karen Gilliam (ph 384-4562).

Plant of the Month By Cheryll Greenwood Kinsley

Amaryllis

Family: Amaryllidaceae
(Amaryllis family)
Genus: *Hippeastrum*

When is an Amaryllis not really an Amaryllis? When it's a *Hippeastrum*, of course. That's the true botanical name of the flower-in-a-box that many of us receive—or give—as gifts for holiday blooms in December. The *Hippeastrum* genus is native to South America, and the genus *Amaryllis* hails from South Africa. They are different plants, but with similar attributes. Both are members of the huge Amaryllidaceae family that also includes daffodils and snowdrops.



The *Hippeastrum* bulb you're planting about now has traveled a few miles on its way to your windowsill. Its ancestors grew in the Andes, but your complex, large flowered hybrid probably started life in Holland or Israel or South Africa. Its very existence is a tribute to plant breeding and hybridizing to suit human purposes. That bulb in your hands—probably 8 inches or so in circumference—has been carefully nurtured by growers for at least two years, under precisely controlled conditions, so it can easily be forced by you to produce up to six flower stalks in five to eight weeks. Left to its own devices, it would prefer to bloom in February.

All you have to do is follow the instructions that came with your bulb. Plant it as soon as possible if it didn't arrive pre-planted. Use a pot not too much larger than the bulb, and please make

sure it has a hole in the bottom for drainage. A reliable rule of thumb is to leave a span of two inches between the outer edge of the bulb and the pot's rim. If there was no accompanying soil, just use a fast-draining commercial potting mix, preferably one without a heavy concentration of peat moss, and make sure the soil is damp before you start. Set the bulb so that the top third of it protrudes above the soil line and water it in to settle it. If you want to set a stake, now is the time to do that. Put the pot in a well-lighted, draft-free place and keep the soil moist but not soggy. When the flower stalks emerge, give the pot a quarter-turn every day to keep things growing straight. That's all there is to it. If you want something even less complicated, you can grow the bulb in a glass vase with only pebbles and water. Just make sure the water level never reaches higher than the very base of the bulb, to submerge the roots but nothing else.

After the blooms have faded, you can rebuild the bulb, if you choose, and try for a repeat performance next year. *Hippeastrum* is naturally very long-lived. It can bloom for as many as 75 years, although modern hybrids will generally have a much shorter life and the quality of the blooms may decline. Bear in mind that after it's bloomed, your bulb is exhausted. If you've grown it in water, it's probably beyond recall. But if you used soil, you can cut the flower stalks off about three inches above the bulb, leaving all foliage intact. Place the pot in a sunny location and water it when the top inch of potting soil is dry to the touch. Give it a monthly meal of water soluble, balanced fertilizer. When all danger of frost has passed, move it outside to a sunny location and keep up the same regimen. In the fall, after the first light frost has blackened the leaves, bring it inside. Cut off the foliage and store the bulb in a cool, dark place—but not the refrigerator—for ten weeks, keeping it almost completely dry. If the fates are smiling, you'll see new growth, at which point you should repot it, water it, and move it to a sunny window. The entire process starts again.

In the southeast part of our country, *Hippeastrum* performs reliably outdoors, forming enormous clumps that are a wonder to behold. Not much chance of that happening here, although the earliest hybrid, *Hippeastrum* x *johnsonii*, dating from 1799, has been reported to be hardy to USDA Zone 5. Long available only from hobbyists, it is now offered by some specialty nurseries and sells out quickly. So perhaps within the next decade I'll have to eat my words—although I won't be eating any *Hippeastrum* because they're quite poisonous—and refer you to an in-ground clump in Whatcom County. I doubt it. But gardeners are a hopeful, determined lot. If one of you tackles this challenge, please let me know how it turns out.

Garden Friends and Foes By Todd Murray

Drugstore Beetle

Order: Coleoptera
(Beetles)

Family: Anobiidae

Species: *Stegobium
paniceum*

Identification & Life History:

I cringe when a customer or a MG asks me, “What’s this little brown beetle?” I cringe because of the over one-quarter million described species of beetles out there, most of them are little brown beetles! After grinding my way through a beetle identification key for the past few years, I now feel confident that many of these little brown beetles that come into our office are drugstore beetles. These beetles are household/ pantry pests. Other similar-looking little brown beetles that come in household samples to our office are: granary weevils, spider beetles, confused flour beetles, cigarette beetles, saw-toothed beetles and rice weevils. Of these rough sounding characters, drugstore beetles are most common.



Courtesy of Ken Gray Collection, OSU

Drugstore beetles come from a large beetle complex of families called the Bostrichoidea that are all very difficult to identify, even to the trained eye. Adults are little reddish-brown beetles about 1/8 inch long. The head is almost totally concealed from view when looking down at the beetle’s back. When viewing from the side, you can see that the head is tucked underneath the prothorax (the segment behind the head) giving it a hunch-backed appearance. The over-all body shape is oval. The head, prothorax and elytra (wing covers) of drugstore beetles are covered in tiny, fine hairs, which are arranged in rows on the wing covers. The larvae are c-shaped, creamy white grubs with a dark head capsule.

The length and timing of the lifecycle for drugstore beetles is dependent on food and temperature. The complete lifecycle can range from two to seven months long. After mating, females lay up to 75 eggs. The newly hatched larvae feed for two to twenty months, depending on the environmental conditions. Pupation lasts for two to three weeks. Adults can live quite long, up to 65 days.



Courtesy of Ken Gray Collection, OSU

Damage & Monitoring:

The drugstore beetle is a cosmopolitan, junk food junkie. A more appropriate name would be the kitchen sink beetle, or the pig beetle, or better yet, the goat beetle, because they eat everything! It got its name because it can be found infesting prescription drugs. Drugstore beetles commonly feed on dried, stored products like: flour, dry mixes, chocolate, spices, dried herbs, cookies, stored grains and dried fruits and vegetables. Other edible items that this beetle has been found feeding on include: wool, leather, horns, hides, books, and wood. More amazing food items include drugs, toxins, such as strychnine powder, and tin cans! Much like wood-eating organisms, drugstore beetles contain symbiotic yeast that helps them digest these ‘food’ items. This yeast can produce complex nutrients such as B vitamins that make it possible for this beetle to eat junk.

Because they can survive with such interesting diets, an infestation can be difficult to get rid of if these beetles go unchecked for some time. Watch for accumulation of beetles at windowsills. Most samples coming into the office are from curious customers who collected adult beetles from windowsills in autumn. Look for adult beetles in stored food products regularly. Monitoring for the grubs is difficult due to their small size and secretive habits. The most common discovery of drugstore beetles in the grub stage is following the bad taste from your spoonful of morning cereal. Regularly check boxed cereals, mixes and grains, for small shot holes chewed through the sides. Look for small piles of dust and debris coming from containers and bags. If you are serious about monitoring drugstore beetles, pheromone traps and lures can be purchased.

Management:

Pesticides are not generally recommended or needed to remedy a drugstore beetle infestation. If the infestation were bad enough to warrant an insecticide, it would be worth calling a professional. Most infestations can be managed by diligence. Careful shopping, cleaning and food storage habits will rid you of your pantry pest problems.

Continued on page 6

Weed of the Month By Laurel Shiner

Goatsrue

Galega officinalis

THREAT: Goatsrue, native to the middle east, was intentionally introduced to North America as potential livestock forage but was found to be unpalatable and toxic to livestock. It invades cropland, pastures, fencelines, roadways and riparian areas. Due to its unpalatable nature, this weed can spread quickly in grazed areas, as the livestock avoid it and graze down competing species. The seeds are spread by water, farm equipment, animal manure, contaminated seed, and soil moving equipment, and probably remain viable in the soil for 5 to 10 years.



DESCRIPTION: Goatsrue is a member of the pea family. It is a perennial with multiple stems growing from a deep taproot. Although it usually grows to a height of about three feet, it can grow as tall as six feet. The compound leaves consist of 5 to 8 pairs of leaflets. The flowers are purple, blue, or white and bloom in clusters at the end of the stems. The seeds are borne in pods containing 1 to 9 seeds, with a single plant capable of producing thousands of pods. The seedpods are narrow, round and slightly more than an inch long.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Goatsrue can be controlled using mechanical or chemical methods. For small infestations, plants can be dug, although care must be taken to remove the entire root. In agricultural fields, alternate cropping and row cropping usually disrupts the life cycle of this plant. Goatsrue can also be controlled using herbicides. All these treatments require follow-up work to remove any surviving plants before they have the opportunity to set seed.

Note: Goatsrue is also the common name given to another member of the pea family, *Tephrosia virginiana*, which is a native plant of North America.

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

Plant of the Month

continued from page 4

Hippeastrum can be propagated by seed, cuttings, and division. For most of us, however, the favored form of propagation is “mail-order catalog.” That’s a far remove from its discovery in Chile in 1828 by a physician from Leipzig on a plant-hunting expedition. When he came across the startlingly beautiful flowers, his only companion was his faithful dog. Dr. Poeppig was reputedly seized with such delight that he uttered “loud shouts of joy,” to which his dog responded with equally enthusiastic yelps and yowls. If you have a similar urge to give voice to your joy when your *Hippeastrum* blooms this December—even if you call it an *Amaryllis*—at least now you’ll know that another plant pioneer felt exactly the same way.

Garden Friends & Foes

continued from page 5

If free-living adults are found, look for potential food items in your pantry. Once the food item is found, throw it out if it is heavily infested. Closely inspect other food items. Questionable food items can be temperature treated by freezing them for a few days or heating them to 120-130° F for a few hours. Heat to 180°F for faster results. Take care in temperature treating food items; you may ruin the product. Do not store dried food items exposed. Food items should be stored in airtight containers. Clear plastic Tupperware containers are good to use to monitor future beetle infestations. This storage practice should be used when buying bulk food items that will be around for a while in your pantry.

Thoroughly clean areas where food is stored. Pay attention to hard to reach places where food crumbs can accumulate. Do not store pet food in areas that are close to your pantry. Many dried pet foods harbor drugstore beetles, along with other pantry pests. Store pet food in airtight containers in the garage or outside. This storage practice should be used when storing birdseed, a great source for Indian meal moths. Many times, just by inspecting products at the store before you buy them can prevent infestations. I believe that this is the most common way for beetles to make it to your home. With an attentive eye, a little foresight and some diligence, drugstore beetle problems can be easily remedied or avoided. I’ve had college roommates with similar diets but were much harder to get rid of.

Timesheets – How to share the good things that you do for the Master Gardener program

We are implementing a new timesheet this month and it is included with this month's newsletter. This record of your contributions to the Whatcom County Master Gardener program is designed to serve multiple purposes.

The Master Gardener program is a publicly funded program with support from Whatcom County, the State of Washington (through WSU), and the USDA. The public rightfully expects accountability for their tax dollars and the Master Gardener program has the same expectations for indicators of positive results for these public funds. Collecting and summarizing the amount of volunteer hours and the numbers of people served is one form of accountability. We also are striving to acquire other indicators, such as the survey of MG clients that Gretchen White and others conducted this year. I will write about those findings soon. Each year, I am expected to report to Whatcom County and WSU about the accomplishments of the MG program, and I partially rely on the information culled from the timesheets to do that.

We also have a need to understand how we allocate the scarce resource of volunteer hours between many demands for their use. It seems like old needs never diminish; yet new needs for our services are constantly emerging. How we plan and respond to needs is something that requires our best information and ideas. The timesheets will give us a better idea where we are truly prioritizing our efforts, which we can then compare to our intentions.

We have just recently joined the ranks of virtually all of the other MG programs in the state (and most in the U.S.) in establishing a minimum requirement of veteran contribution of hours per year to stay as an active Master Gardener. The timesheet will help us monitor those requirements and measure if this was the right decision.

Lastly, the Foundation and we in the office have renewed a commitment to recognizing volunteers via a number of different avenues, such as the awards given last month at the graduation. The timesheets will be one of many ways that we can identify deserving volunteers for recognition.

So, please, please take the time and effort to send us the timesheets each month so we can fulfill our obligations to let people know what contributions our volunteers make, and our intentions of managing this program the best we can. I realize that filling out forms is not what makes for a satisfied volunteer, yet we really do need that information. Thank you very much for your efforts.

A Very Special Award

Continued from page 1

- c. SPOKEN to a group of children, a garden club, a class of Master Gardeners, the public.
- d. Spent far too many hours to count each year WORKING in support of a specific project such as Hovander demonstration garden, the annual plant sale, the greenhouse, cleaning and organizing the office.
- e. Giving an extraordinary number of hours of VOLUNTEER TIME such as keeping regular hours at the office no matter what, helping set up and run the Master Gardener classes, or putting in countless hours towards organizing the advanced training program.

Selection of yearly recipient:

The award shall be made through a nomination process. Nominations will be accepted from any Master Gardener by August 1 of each year, submitted in writing to the board with the nominee's name and reasons for the nomination. The board will appoint a committee to choose a finalist for that year. It will then be presented at the graduation of that year's new class.



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:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| December 5 | Monthly Foundation Board Meeting
Extension Office |
| December 12 7 to 9 p.m. | Monthly Foundation Meeting
Extension Office |
| February 19 All Day | Northwest Flower & Garden Show
See article for more information |
| March 18 9 a.m to 2 p.m. | Bonsai Workshop
Contact Chris Hurst for more information |
| Wednesdays 8 to 9 a.m. | Master Gardener breakfasts
Babe's in Ferndale |