

# Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

February 2003



Don't forget the advanced training will be held in September, not this month as it has been in the past. Yet, if you review the calendar this will be a very busy month.

The monthly Foundation meeting will be the annual seed exchange. 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 don't want to miss it!

The 2003 Master Gardener basic training begins March 4. Any veterans who would like to refresh their training may attend. We've included a Training Schedule with this newsletter for your use. Remember the trainees get priority seating, so please sit in the back of the room.

See you at the next Foundation Meeting.

*Al McHenry*

## Start Potting Now!

By Karen Gilliam

The Master Gardener Plant Sale is May 10. It's time to start potting. We have limited greenhouse space at Hovander this year, so we have to be very selective as to what we plant in there. Half of the space will be used for tomatoes, the other half is for choice cuttings or seedlings that will be blooming by May 10.

Our goal this year is to have each member donate at least 2 flats of plants to the sale. A flat consists of 18- 4" pots or 8- 1-gallon pots. This can be from your garden, someone else's garden, or plants that you pot at the greenhouse or potting workshop. When making divisions, a larger division is preferable over several small divisions. A gallon sells for \$3-\$4 and a 4" for \$1. A gallon is less work and more profitable. Customers would rather buy a larger plant most of the time.

If you have the capability to start seeds – lots of light for sturdy seedlings. They should be started soon to be large and blooming by May 10. Check with Linda Bergquist, 360/371-5334, or Diane Rapoza, 360/676-9563, to see if there is room in the greenhouse to finish them. Only one tray per variety, *please*. **If there is too many of one variety it devalues the product.**

For the rest of us, transplanting volunteer seedlings or divisions of the hardy perennials is the easiest and most profitable. We can sell natives, trees, shrubs, herbs, groundcovers, perennials and annuals. February is a great month for transplanting the trees and shrubs. Most of the perennials like to be divided just as they are coming up, usually in March or early April. With the mild winter so far, some are coming up now. Once potted, the plants should be protected

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## Newsletter Deadline:

*Third Wednesday of every month.*

## Tis the Season



By Faye Agner

Weather? Here it is February and we have had a real hodge podge of wind, rain, sun, cold, not so cold. El nino is once again with us, bringing a warmer, drier prediction of thing to follow for the up coming year.

**Pruning.** A great deal of your pruning should be finished by now. What ever is left should be tended to now. Along with the yearly pruning needs, keep a good eye out for wind damage and remove any broken or otherwise damaged branches. Complete the pruning of fruit trees and grapes by the end of March. Roses need to get their final pruning at the end of the month to avoid any possible damaging cold weather, which still may occur in February. Climbing roses usually need to be thinned out. Should you wait any longer you may do damage to 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. Monitor spruces for aphids. Spruce aphids attack in the middle of winter. By the time you see the needles dropping in March, the damage is done. After a bad year, the only needles left are those on the ends of branches. Rest a manila file folder inside the tree on a lower branch. Then, wearing gloves, hold the end of the branch directly above the folder and gently beat severely with the flat of your other hand. Sift through the debris that falls onto the folder and look for tiny green aphids. Spray if there are more than five aphids per test (do at least three samples per tree).

**Fertilizing.** Fertilize 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. Growing plants remove nutrients from the soil and some fertilizers acidify the soil more than others. 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. There is still time to get lime on your lawn. Always wait at least 14 days after between a lime application and before applying a nitrogen fertilizing. If you apply lime and nitrogen together, the nitrogen volatilizes into the air.

**Planting and transplanting.** Survey your landscape and decide any changes you wish to make for the coming year. 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, and very close to the seedlings. Don't fertilize the new seedlings until after they develop their true leaves.

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, Coralbells, 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.

**Spraying.** Now is the time to pick a mild, dry morning, and spray for peach leaf curl. You can contact you nursery person or the Extension Office for advice on what to use. Do not neglect your fruit trees or you ornamentals for a spring spray.

**Odds and ends.** If you have not done so already, now is the time to put the grey, wet days to use by cleaning, sharpening and treating the handles of your tools. By painting the handles a bright color they will be more easily found where they have been dropped. Some of our Northwest seed catalogs have very good cultural information about how to grow, when to start and all that type of information. Pull any weed you see now, to prevent their spread and keep a keen eye out for slugs and their eggs.

**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.

## President's Message



**Pat Nelson,**  
*MGF President*

January 2003—a record breaker—it sounds great to say it was much warmer and drier than usual, but even though I do enjoy looking out my window at my blooming rhody, we do need some winter with rain! But then, February will hopefully make up for it! And we don't care because we will be at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show surrounded by spring!! If you haven't made reservations yet [February 19], call Karen Gilliam at 360/384-4562. Speaking of Karen, be sure and read her article on 'propagation' in this letter.

January foundation meeting featured Chris Hurst's list of the new exciting upcoming workshops and trips! Flower World, Rhody Ridge, UBC, Thomas Hobbs home and nursery, and Little and Lewis to name a few. Details will be announced at a later date. The bonsai workshop to be held on March 18 still has room. The grafting Clinic will be at Tennant Lake on the 1st Saturday in March.

Diane Rapoza told us that 'Big Rock Gardens' would like Master Gardeners to help them by offering workshops at their gardens, more information later.

The orientations for the new class are going well. We have interviewed 31 so far with more on slate. They are all very anxious to get started—which will be March 4.

February board meets Thursday, February 6 at 10 a.m.—all are welcome! The Foundation meeting will meet Thursday, February 13 at 7 p.m. Mike DeLancy from DeLancy's Nursery in Ferndale will share with us what it takes to grow the exceptional quality plants that they offer.

See you then!! Pat

## MG Lake Whatcom Crane Fly Survey 2003

- √ **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. In 2002, fourteen Master Gardeners sampled 78 different lawns in the watershed and found no crane fly problems. In fact, 90% of the lawns sampled had no crane fly larvae at all!

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 15 and/or March 22 as the official MG Crane Fly Survey Day.

Plant of the Month ..... By Cheryll Greenwood Kinsley

## Cupid's Dart

**Family:** Compositae  
(Daisy family)

**Genus:** *Catananche*

**Species:** *caerulea*

In February, legend has it that we're all to focus on our heart's desire. If you're of a certain age, you might just be reminded this month of an old song, sung by Sam Cooke, that begins, "Cupid, draw back your bow, and let your arrow go..." Who *doesn't* think of Cupid at least once during February? And what real gardener would choose roses in a box and chocolates wrapped in foil over an actual plant named after that chubby little guy with the wings and a harp?

I won't linger too long on the answer to that question. Roses and chocolate are both dear to my heart.

*Catananche caerulea* has no thorns and it won't add inches anywhere you don't want them. This perky perennial *will* bring cheer to your garden this summer, however, and warm your heart with its casual habits, dependable performance, and ease of care.

Native to southwest Europe and fully hardy here, Cupid's Dart grows to two feet tall and perhaps a foot wide. Its slender stems emerge from upright clumps of slim, blue-green, fuzzy leaves that seem a little sticky. Atop the stems form silver buds that open to daisy-like blossoms with papery bracts behind the petals. They're not in the least heart-shaped, but they are reminiscent of cornflowers as well as daisies. The species has lavender flowers, while the cultivar *Catananche caerulea* 'Alba' has white ones with blue eyes and 'Major' has blooms that are deep violet tending to blue. Other cultivars are appearing, too, as plant breeders have a field day with this old-garden favorite that remains quite popular in Europe. I've heard rumors that a yellow *C. caerulea* is available, but I can neither confirm that nor imagine such a departure from the white-to-deep blue color palette. Cupid's Darts dry well, regardless of their color, and they find good homes in either fresh or dried bouquets. They're not prone to aphids or black spot—take that, roses! And if you start *C. caerulea* from seeds this spring, you'll have flowers in August that will continue to first frost. No pruning necessary.

Cupid's Dart should be grown in regular garden soil with good drainage, placed in full sun, and given a bit of extra water during the summer. It is a short-lived perennial so count on sowing seed or buying starts about every three years if you intend it to be a permanent fixture in your garden. It will reseed itself, although somewhat half-heartedly and usually without filling the space it once occupied.

Its name is derived from the Greek word *katananke* meaning "very forcefully" or "most definitely" and the Latin *caerulea*, which means "blue." You have to know in your heart that the flowers will be true-blue. And just in case you were wondering: yes, *Catananche caerulea* was used by both the Greeks and the Romans as a key ingredient in powerful love potions.

I guess that's a story we can all take to heart.

Happy Valentine's Day, everyone!



# Weed of the Month .....By Laurel Shiner

## Buffalobur

*Solanum rostratum*

**THREAT:** Buffalobur, also called Kansas thistle, is native to central Mexico and the Great Plains of the United States. Although this plant is not established in Washington, it has become a pest in other states and countries. Buffalobur can be a contaminant of garden seeds and birdseed, so occasionally is found in our area growing in gardens or under bird feeders. Buffalobur is covered with sharp spines and produces a bur which can tangle in clothes, hair and fur. Additionally, the plant is a host to the Colorado potato beetle and contains an alkaloid that can poison livestock. Buffalobur will grow on most soil types and is often found in disturbed areas. It is drought tolerant and a single plant can produce 8500 seeds. Since buffalobur can self-fertilize, a single plant can start an infestation.



**DESCRIPTION:** Buffalobur is an annual plant in the potato family. It grows up to two feet tall and has erect, branched stems. The plant is covered with yellow, star-shaped hairs and with straight yellow spines, which are up to ½ inch long. The leaves are irregularly lobed and grow from 2 to 6 inches long. Buffalobur produces bright yellow flowers in May to October. The flowers are about an inch in diameter and have 5 partially joined petals. The seeds are produced within a berry, enclosed in a spiny covering that enlarges to form a bur. In the autumn, the dry plant breaks off at the soil surface and is tumbled in the wind, spreading seed. Seeds are also spread by animals, when the burs catch in fur.



**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Buffalobur can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Since this plant is an annual, any method that prevents seed production will eventually eradicate an infestation. Small infestations or solitary plants can be hand dug or pulled (wear sturdy gloves). Frequent mowing can also be used to prevent flowering.

Cultivation will kill buffalobur plants and should be done before the plants flower. For site-specific chemical recommendations, contact the weed control board.

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

## PNW Birdfeeding Guide

*From Wild Bird Crossing*

Bird Type	Favorite Food	Also Eats
Chickadee	Black oil sunflower, peanut kernals, suet	Black strip sunflower, peanut butter
Red Winged Blackbird	Cracked corn, suet	White proso millet, bread
Northern Flicker	Suet, peanut butter, sunflower seeds	Fruit, bread
Gold Finch	Thistle (niger), black oil sunflower	Fruit, suet mixes
House Finch	Black oil sunflower, thistle (niger)	Fruit, suet mixes
Evening Grosbeak	Black stripe sunflower, black oil sunflower, tree seeds	Suet, white proso millet
Hummingbird	Plant Nectar, small insects	Sugar water
Junco	White proso millet	Black oil sunflower, nut meats
Kinglet	Suet, Suet mixes	Bread
Nuthatch	Suet, Suet mixes	Black oil sunflower, nut meats
Pine Siskin	Thistle (niger), black oil sunflower	Nut meats
Quail	Cracked corn	White proso millet
Robin	Suet, mealworms, berries	Bread, raisins, currants, nut meats
Sparrow	White proso millet, peanut kernals	Black oil sunflower, suet
Starling	Cracked corn, milo, suet	Bread
Stellar's Jay	Peanut kernals, hazlenuts, black stripe sunflower, black oil sunflower, suet	Bread
Wester Tanager	Suet, fruits	Mealworms, bread
Varied Thrush	Suet white proso millet, mealworms, fruit, berries	Black oil sunflower, cracked corn, raisins, currants, nut meats
Woodpecker	Suet, meat scraps	Fruit, nuts, sunflower seeds
Wren	Suet, suet mixes	Peanut butter, nut meats, bread

## Garden Friends and Foes ..... By Todd Murray

### Fleas

**Order:** Siphonaptera  
**Family:** Pulicidae  
**Genre:** *Ctenocephalides*, *Pulex*

**Identification & Life History:** This is the season of being indoors and many of our pest problems follow us inside. This month, fleas are on my mind, in my house and biting my ankles.

There are many kinds of fleas, about 2,000 worldwide, and all require a blood meal from a mammal or bird. Fleas have a complete life cycle, meaning they go through egg, larval, pupal and mature adult stages. Adult fleas are easily recognized and the most common stage that is found. Adults are spiny and brown. The body of adult fleas is strongly flattened laterally with long legs made for jumping. Both sexes feed on blood but the female requires the blood meal to produce an egg brood. Depending on the species, adult fleas may stay on the host (such as cat fleas) or leap off after feeding.



Adult fleas are known for their amazing acrobatic feats and their amazing strength, but they also are impressive breeders. On an average rate, fleas lay one egg per hour. Adult fleas can live from 4 to 40 days. You do the math! Eggs of fleas are small (about 0.5mm) white and oval. Eggs drop off the host, usually in areas where the host sleeps (like a dog blanket, carpet, couch). After a couple of days, eggs hatch into small white grubs. The grubs eat protein debris and the fecal pellets dropped by the adults after a blood meal. Even being a lover of biology, I do have to admit that this has to be one of nature's more disgusting life cycles.



These small, legless, eyeless grubs develop and pupate within 4 to 15 days depending on the species, temperature and humidity. Once larval development is complete, fleas enter the pupal stage, which can last up to 12 months, also depending on temperature and other environmental factors. The pupating larvae tie up debris to hide the cocoon. Adults hatching from the cocoon can be stimulated by compaction or disturbances such as walking or shaking the ground. Under room temperatures, the entire life cycle of a flea may be completed in 18 days.



**Damage & Monitoring:** Historically, fleas have been serious transmitters of disease such as the bubonic plague, Black Death. Other diseases include murine typhus and tapeworms. Nowadays, fleas are generally annoyance pests. Fleas bite our pets and us, causing red welts or spots and major irritation. Some pets and people can have sensitive reactions to bites and develop allergic dermatitis.

In general, fleas cause a lot of irritation, scratching and some blood loss.

Most people monitor fleas by checking their pets or by watching them jump up onto your socks as you walk through an area. There are flea traps commercially available that use light to attract and trap adult fleas. Simple, regular grooming of your pets is the most reliable way to monitor. Look in places that are hard to reach for your dog or cat, such as ears or the lower belly. Look for the dried blood pellets left by the adults. If adult fleas are found, drop them into water because they can be difficult to squish between your fingers. Flea combs are available at pet stores for fine grooming and removal of flea adults. This is probably the preferred method of monitoring by your pet.

**Management:** Integrating different pest management tactics is the only way to reduce and prevent flea problems. For example, if you only manage fleas occurring on your pet using flea dips, there will be many more emerging from the carpet to replace them. Management needs to take in consideration the flea's biology. Management efforts should take place indoors, outdoors (to a lesser degree) and on the pet itself. For outdoor prevention, mow grass regularly and manage weedy borders where your pet spends time lounging. Reducing the local humidity in areas where your pet hangs out may reduce survival of the larvae.

## Garden Friends and Foes

*Continued from page 6*

Management indoors should be focused on sanitation. Because fleas are nesting parasites, regularly vacuum the area where your pet sleeps and spends the majority of time. For dogs, this could be a dog rug or kennel. For cats, it could be someplace that might not be as obvious, such as on top of the refrigerator. Vacuuming can remove some of the eggs, larvae, pupae and adults. Follow your pet around and see where they spend most of their time. Vacuum thoroughly and frequently. Wash or dispose of pet linens, such as dog blankets or rugs.

There are various insecticides registered for flea control in the home. Many of these products contain a mixture of active ingredients, choose one that contains an Insect Growth Regulator (IGR). These insecticides can be slow acting but are very effective. IGR's disrupt the life cycle of fleas and do not allow them to develop into biting adults. Flea bombs are not the ideal way for treating flea problems; flea bombs disperse the insecticide into many other areas where fleas do not occur. Directed aerosol sprays treat only the suspect area and result in better coverage in tight places. Treat areas where your pet spends a significant amount of time. As always, be sure to read and follow the labeled directions carefully.

Regular bathing of your pet will reduce the population of fleas on your pet, however this can be a major chore depending on how your pet feels about baths. On-the-pet treatments come in many different forms: shampoos, dips, dabs, rinses, powders, sprays, pour-on's, foams, and pills. Choose one that best fits you and your pet; consult your veterinarian about specific recommendations. Flea collar's containing insecticides do not offer much control; avoid prolonged, unnecessary exposure to insecticides. Many on-the-pet insecticides are relatively safe but reading and following the label is paramount when treating your pet.

Here in the PNW, we spend a lot of money trying to get rid of fleas. Keep in mind that fleas have also brought us joy and good deals through flea circuses and flea markets. Fleas should also bring us Pacific North Westerners a sense of pride. We are home to the largest flea in the world, measuring in at almost 1/3 of an inch! Luckily these fleas are specific to the mountain beaver.

To learn about fleas and flea management visit: <http://gardening.wsu.edu/library/insemisc/fleas.htm>.

## 2003 Lake Whatcom Cranefly Survey

*Continued from page 3*

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

**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](mailto:tamurray@coopext.cahe.wsu.edu) or 360/676-6736. Or sign up on line [http://whatcom.wsu.edu/cranefly/MG\\_Survey\\_2003.htm](http://whatcom.wsu.edu/cranefly/MG_Survey_2003.htm) (soon to be posted).

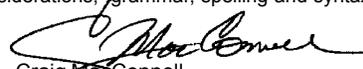
**Enlist a Lake Whatcom Homeowner Now!** If you or someone you know lives in the Lake Whatcom watershed, please be a participant in our survey. We will soon have many ways for Lake Whatcom residents to sign up for the survey. Visit <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/cranefly> to find an on-line registration form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



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](mailto: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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## Dates to Remember:

- |                   |                       |   |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---|
| February 6 .....  | 10 a.m. to Noon ..... | <b>Monthly Foundation Board Meeting</b><br>Extension Office |
| February 13 ..... | 7 to 9 p.m. ....      | <b>Monthly Foundation Meeting</b><br>Extension Office       |
| February 19 ..... | All Day .....         | <b>N.W. Flower &amp; Garden Show Bus Trip</b>               |
| March 1 .....     | 9 a.m. to Noon .....  | <b>Grafting Workshop</b><br>Tenant Lake House, Ferndale     |
| March 8 .....     | All Day .....         | <b>Tree Fruit Workshop</b><br>Mt. Vernon Research Station   |
| Wednesdays .....  | 8 to 9 a.m. ....      | <b>Master Gardener Breakfasts</b><br>Babe's in Ferndale     |