

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

September 2003

Well the Fair is over and it turned out better than we expected. The number of clients asking questions was slightly below average, so it may take a while for people to find us. I want to thank all of you who helped put up and take down the Fair booth; maybe you can do it again.

Talking about the Fair lets all congratulate Karen Gilliam on her prodigious feat of winning 14 Blue ribbons out of 19 entries!! She won more blue ribbons than any other exhibitor. How about teaching the rest of us how to win blue ribbons at the Fair?

Our annual Advanced Training is here! The date is September 5, and the place is the Bellingham Technical College. Please note that there will not be any food service available on that date, so you need to read the instructions in the brochure. This will be a fun day, and will be very instructive, so I hope you all can come. See you there.

September is the month to vote on next years' Foundation Officers. If you are willing to serve as an officer and have not been contacted, please get on the ballot by getting in touch with our president or the nominating committee. We will send out the ballots by mail so please participate by selecting your favorite candidate and mailing the ballot back to us.

Please take note of the date of the Graduation/Potluck in November, and make plans to join us there.

Al McHenry

Summer Rainfall

~Al McHenry

	2003	50-year Average
May	2.42	2.17
June	1.22	1.79
July	0.07	1.24
Total	3.71	5.20

Source: Western Regional Climate Center

We thought this newsletter should include some information about water, so we are reprinting a rainfall table from the Bellingham Herald. It shows the rainfall for May, June and July of this year and makes a comparison between the historical average. We know that August is continuing to be dry, and we remember that last summer was also very dry.

We know that the lack of rain coupled with low snow packs affects the water tables, stream and lake levels. This knowledge is very valuable when we Master Gardeners staff a clinic and begin to diagnose plant problems. When you look at a plant that has been

brought to the clinic for a diagnosis remember the weather conditions that the plant has been growing in and the stress that the drought has created. Some large trees samples will not be brought in until next year, so the Master Gardener involved in the diagnosing will have to remember these weather conditions, and take them in to account.

Water conservation is also an appropriate subject to be discussed this year, see the article later in this newsletter.

WSU Master Gardener Program Purpose Statement:

To provide public education in gardening and home horticulture based on research-based information from WSU Cooperative Extension.

WSU Master Gardener Program Slogan:

"Cultivating Plants, People and Communities since 1973"

Newsletter Deadline:

*Third Wednesday of every
month.*

Tis the Season



By Faye Agner

September gives the first hint of change to the glow of autumn. It is also the month when spring-flowering bulbs catalogs appear on your doorstep; daffodils, tulips, crocus, hyacinth, lilies and what have you. Order early and get a discount or free bulbs. The selection is great and tempting.

The key to success with bulbs is planting at the proper time. As a general rule, aim to plant about six weeks before the first ground-freezing frost in your area. The "sweet spot" is when nighttime temperature is in the 40- to 50-degree Fahrenheit range. Planting then will allow your bulbs enough time to put down roots and establish themselves. However, bear in mind that planting too early may encourage rot, fungus or disease. The first bulbs to plant, regardless of your zone, are daffodils, hyacinths, and camassia. Next come tulips, crocus, snowdrops, and iris. Last are paper white narcissus and amaryllis. If you miss the optimal planting time, don't wait until next spring. Plant them anyway, even if it is January or force them indoors. Or, try planting them in pots and refrigerate them until spring.

There are many reasons for planting bulbs, among which is they seem to foil deer to some degree, and voles avoid them as they are poisonous. I hope you took stock this spring or summer to note where you need color and also need to replace bulbs. Nothing brings spring on like the appearance of crocus poking up their cheerful, colorful heads. Selecting healthy, good bulbs is very important, larger bulb size results, usually, in larger flowers, too. Planting beds should have good draining soil, best in full sunlight. Work the soil to a depth of 12 inches, and add organic fertilizer, such as bone meal.

Other fertilizers, with a ratio of 5-10-5, can also be used. Use about a cup of fertilizer for 6 bulbs. Planting depth for the bulbs are: tulips 6"; crocuses 2"; daffodils 7"; irises 3"; hyacinths 4". After planting, the soil should be soaked down to dissolve the fertilizer and to settle the soil around the bulbs and to remove air pockets.

If you want to plant your daffodils once and then forget about them for a few years, opt for naturalizing bulbs. Specialists call daffodils that come back every year, especially ones in natural settings, "perennialized." They can live to incredible ages. They're the ones you want for rivers of blooms or meadows full of daffodils.

If you plan to create a naturalized area in your lawn, make sure it's a site you can leave unmowed for at least six weeks in the spring. The bulbs need to store up as much food as they can to make it to the next year.

Some favorites for perennial plantings are Birma, February Gold, Foresight, Ice Follies, Ceylon, Accent, Jetfire, and Actaea. A mixture of these bulbs will give you a range of color and blooming times.

September is the time when you are enjoying the fruits of your garden. Tomatoes, peppers, some green beans, corn, carrots, cabbage, kohlrabi and even potatoes are ready to take to the table. Nothing tastes quite as good as something fresh from your own garden.

Continue to deadhead your flowering annuals and perennials. If they are allowed to seed, they will stop flowering.

You can substantially improve your soil in garden beds by sowing them with crimson clover or vetch. They minimize erosion from wind and rain all winter. In the spring, about a month before planting, till them under, and the added organic matter will greatly improve the soil's texture and organic content.

Early in the month, set out seedlings of arugula, kale, cabbage, purple-sprouting broccoli, kohlrabi and cauliflower. You can direct-seed lettuce, radishes, spinach, and mustard greens for fall and winter

harvest by using a row cover of some kind. Garlic, shallots, and some onions and potatoes for spring and summer harvest can also be planted.

September is also the time to dig and divide perennials, such as cornflowers, garden phlox and foxgloves. Transplant them now so their roots will become established before winter. Label plants so you'll know what you're growing.

September is a good time for lawn renovation. This is usually done in the spring, but recovery is almost as good this month, because fall rains and moderate temperatures hasten the establishment of new roots. Plant only recommended species and cultivars for Western Washington, which will go a long way toward preventing problems. Perennial turf type Rye grass and fine Fescue will perform satisfactorily in our climate.

It is not too late to take summer cuttings of your favorite shrubs. You should use partially ripened wood, although only a smaller percentage may take, and the ones which do will probably have to be left in a protected location during the late fall and winter. Roots may not develop before next spring. Cuttings may be classified according to the plant parts—as roots, tubers, rhizomes, stems or leaves—or according to the stage of development of the parts—as dormant, ripe or hardwood cuttings, or active, that is green, immature or softwood cuttings.

The time is here for the fall webworms. Many ornamental trees and shrubs with soft foliage are preferred by the fall-webworms. Full-grown caterpillars are about an inch long. There are both non-chemical and chemical means of controlling fall webworms. The simplest method is to locate the fall webworm nest in the tree or shrub, cut it out and destroy it.

September is also a good time for planting or transplanting peonies and rhubarb plants. If you plant rhubarb now, you can usually start enjoying a pie by next spring. High time for dividing the Irises, if you didn't get to it in July or August.



Advanced Training Update

~Merrilee Kullman

I was given the opportunity to “fill in” for Pat, while she and the *President’s Message* are on vacation. I hope each of you received a copy of the Advanced Training registration brochure. Many of you have already sent your forms in. The cut off date was August 18. If you missed the date, don’t despair, it’s not too late!!! There are still some places available. The Advanced Training Committee has put together an outstanding program and I’m sure you will find it both educational and entertaining. The program is on September 5 and consists of: Craig MacConnell’s presentation on Soil Biology, **“It’s More Than Dirt-Life Below Ground”**; **“Landscape Rehabilitation- Twelve Steps to a Sustainable Garden”**, given by Linda Chalker-Scott. Marianne Binetti, who is the keynote speaker for the statewide advanced training, will speak on **“No Work, No Water Landscape”**, and Sharon Collman’s presentation will be **“Cool Bugs That Help You Run a Healthy Garden**. We welcome your registration, but we will not be able to include any food orders at this late date. If you have any questions, please call me, Merrilee Kullman, at 360/398-2408.

I just received a notice from Whatcom in Bloom. For the third year in a row the demonstration garden at Hovander Park has won an award. The awards will be presented at 7p.m., Thursday, September 4, at the County Courthouse. This award is a tribute to the members of this year’s class and the dedicated veterans who put in so much of their time and effort at Hovander.

Final Garden Tour of the Season

The September Foundation meeting on the 11th will be the final garden tour for the season. We will finally get the opportunity to ooh and aah Sharon Lindsay’s fabulous connection of bonsai, which take up her entire back yard. They are in all stages, from bonsai-to-be, bonsai in training, to some very mature specimens. Sharon’s front yard is very colorful and makes a wonderful welcome to her home.

The second garden, where we will have a very brief meeting, is that of Laurel Bliss. Her tall iron gate, by Chris Pauley, welcomes you to a spacious yard with an old apple orchard. To the back are rock paths and formations created by Scott Maurmann, which look as though they’ve been in place for decades. All this is tied together by a great collection of shrubs and perennials.

We will meet at Sharon’s at 6:00 p.m. To get to her house at 1231 Racine Street from I - 5, take exit 253 and go east on Lakeway past Fred Meyers. Cross streets are in alphabetical order. You will come to a light at Puget Street. The next street is Queen. Turn right onto Queen and drive up a steep hill. Watch for balloons on your left. This is the BACK of Sharon’s - her house faces Racine Street.

To drive to Laurel’s, return to I - 5 and drive south to exit 250. Turn right onto Old Fairhaven Parkway and drive west toward Fairhaven. At 20th Street, turn right. Take the first left at Wilson and drive 2 1/2 blocks to 1750 Wilson Avenue. Please car pool if possible. See you there!

New Monthly e-Newsletter

Whatcom County Cooperative Extension invites you to sign up for a new monthly newsletter, Gardening for Your Watershed. This e-mail-only newsletter features timely tips for keeping plants healthy and managing pests—all while protecting water quality. To subscribe, contact Scarlet Tang at scarlet@coopext.cahe.wsu.edu or 360/676-6736.

Plant of the Month By Cheryll Greenwood Kinsley

Tutsan

Family: Hypericaceae (St. "Requires minimal moisture."
Johnswort family)

Genus: *Hypericum*
Species: *androsaemum*

You can hang that sign on a branch of the nearest *Hypericum androsaemum*. Aren't those just the perfect words to warm a gardener's heart this time of year? Whoops, wait a minute. Now that I think about it, perhaps "warm" is the wrong term to use, particularly during this Summer of 2003, when some of us have wondered if the west coast didn't flip-flop and switch us with southern California sometime in the middle of the night in early June when we weren't paying attention. It's hot! Perhaps I should have said, "chill" a gardener's heart—but that makes me think of slugs and root weevils and Asian longhorn beetles. Anyway, not having to water very much sounds good. We're all too busy to wet everything down, and water's scarce anyway. So aren't we just all set to appreciate a plant that doesn't need much water—or much care, either?



Besides, it's really pretty.

In fact, it was Tutsan's good looks, not its water requirements, that persuaded me to choose it as this month's featured plant. Tutsan turns heads. It turned mine, on a visit to John Van Miert's yard late last summer. I couldn't identify it and was amazed when he told me it was a *Hypericum*. I associate that name with the dusty, bedraggled stuff that suffers alongside highways across the West where it was planted no doubt by the department of transportation (sorry, Al, nothing personal) with the expectation that nothing would kill it. They were very nearly right, but it just doesn't look very attractive while it's so busy surviving.

The highway species is *Hypericum calycinum*, commonly but not so affectionately known as creeping St. Johnswort. It does have interesting yellow flowers, but then so does Tutsan. Those flowers are characteristic of the *Hypericum* genus and most of its 400 species of trees, shrubs, and herbaceous perennials have them. The flowers have no nectar and so bees aren't interested in them. But their bright color and the abundant pollen produced by the many stamen attract beetles and many insects to do the job.

The blooms begin in early June and last in our area through the end of July, when they are replaced by red berries that look a little like translucent cranberries. These hang on well into fall, gradually turning glossy black. *Hypericum androsaemum* is deciduous and sometimes a little finicky about cold. If the top does die back in the winter, the roots should survive, particularly if you put some mulch around them in the fall.

H. androsaemum has characteristic flat stems and beautiful leaves that are nicely shaped and quite large. They begin the growing season green, turn chartreuse in mid-summer—particularly in full sun—and in early fall, they acquire a purplish tint which goes very nicely with the black berries. The berries, by the way, are inedible but not poisonous. Traditional healers made a compote of them and administered it as a diuretic. In Europe the leaves are used as poultices and ground up for healing salves. That's how Tutsan got its name, patois of the French *toute saine* which, loosely translated, means "absolutely, totally healthy."

Tutsan is native to the open woods and hillsides of Eurasia, which helps to explain its tolerance for soil on the dry side. *H. androsaemum* is susceptible to root rot in heavy soil and wilt and rust where the humidity is high. I'm told nematodes are a problem in the southeast. Mine is troubled by an as-yet unidentified chewer—a very neat one, at that—but the damage is well within my tolerance level. I was thrilled the other day to come across a photograph of a Tutsan from a fine British garden with the same cuts as mine—and it wasn't a diagnostic exercise, either. If it doesn't bother them, it's certainly not going to bother me.

H. androsaemum is easy to grow in average, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade—although the

Garden Friends and FoesBy Todd Murray

Moisture Ants

Order: Hymenoptera

Family: Formicidae

Species: *Acanthomyops* spp., *Lasius* spp.

Description & Life History:

Moisture ants are comprised of multiple species of yellow ants and cornfield ants, in the genus *Acanthomyops* and *Lasius*, respectively. Both species can be described as “little yellow ants.” Using your handy WSU publication, “Identification and Habits of Key Ant Pests of Washington,” EB 0671, you can distinguish these genera from others by: the circular fringe of hairs around the terminal orifice (the hairy butt), the notch in its back (not convex in shape from the side) and the wide upper lip (wide clypeus). Yes, I know it sounds like a description of Quasimodo, but didn’t I previously warn you that identifying ants isn’t the most glamorous Master Gardener task? Becoming familiar with this key to ant pests will empower you to identify almost any ant genus that comes into the office and I strongly encourage that you learn how to use this key.



A *Lasius* spp. of ant. Note the notch in the dorsum (back) of the ant’s thorax (photo from <http://www.acad.carleton.edu/curricular/BIOL/resources/ant/index.html>).

These ants, like all ants, are truly social insects that are altruistic; they sacrifice their own reproductive capabilities for the functioning of the colony. They have a cast system that works amazingly unified, just like bees and termites. Worker ants forage for sweet sugars and protein and are often found tending aphids for their honeydew. Workers bring back food for the developing larvae, other casts and the queen. Moisture ants are monomorphic meaning that all the casts look similar.

Ant colonies are started from a single pregnant female (queen) and can grow up to several thousand individuals over time. Some ant colonies can persist for over 20 years. During the summer and fall, reproductive ants (males and queens) are produced by the colony. The reproductives are winged and form mating swarms. Winged male ants are often brought into the clinic for identification; these ants are very difficult to identify and you will need the wingless workers or winged females for identification. *Lasius* species are most common type of moisture ant that is brought into our office.

Damage:

Moisture ants prefer to nest in water damaged, rotting wood. In nature, you can find colonies inhabiting fallen trees and tree stumps that are in the advanced stages of decay. Because moisture ants enjoy sweets, they can often come into our houses to feed on any sugar left unprotected; this can be annoying. And because they inhabit wood, they can cause accelerated decay in our homes. Colonies that develop in decaying wood of a house, like carpenter ants and termites, can weaken wooden structures.

Monitoring & Management:

If multiple winged moisture ants are found around the house, do not immediately assume that you have an ant problem. Many winged ants become trapped in houses and collect on the windowsill during swarming season. Instead of looking for a treatment for the problem, begin to inspect your house.



Water damaged wood in contact with the soil. This is a great place to look for moisture ant colonies (photo by Art Antonelli).

Since moisture ants prefer to nest in rotting wood, look for areas of your home that are susceptible to excess moisture. Check wood near gutters, leaky plumbing, windowsills and drains where wood can become damp. Also look for wood that comes into contact with soil, such as porch steps, support beams and low siding.

Investigate rotting wood for evidence of ant activity. Look for tunneling and sawdust. If damage is found, confirm that it is moisture ants causing the damage. Wood damaged by moisture ants is cardboard-like in appearance. Many other destructive wood-nesting pests, such as carpenter ants and termites, may be causing the damage and treatment of these pests may differ.

Yellow Floating Heart

Nymphoides peltata



THREAT: Yellow floating heart is an aquatic plant, native to Eurasia and the Mediterranean area, which was introduced to the United States as an ornamental plant by the late 1880's. In Washington State, the main population of this plant is in the Spokane River. This floating-leaved plant can form dense mats, which interfere with recreation, water movement, and native plants and animals. The mats of plants can cause a reduction in the oxygen content in the water, affecting fish. Yellow floating heart reproduces by stolens and by seed, which are dispersed by water. Large plant fragments may also produce new plants. This plant grows in still and slow moving fresh water.

DESCRIPTION: Yellow floating heart is an aquatic perennial. It has waterlily-like floating leaves attached to a long stem rooted in the substrate. The heart-shaped leaves are green with purplish undersides and are wavy along the edges. The showy yellow flowers have five petals and are about an inch in diameter. The petals are arranged like spokes on a wheel and are fringed along the margins. The flowers are borne on an upright stalk, a few inches above the water, with two to five flowers on each stalk. 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 from water bodies. Yellow floating heart can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Bottom barriers can also be used in small areas, to prevent rooted aquatic plant growth. If plants are harvested or cut, all plant pieces should be removed from the water. It is not known if grass carp will eat yellow floating heart.

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

Who Am I?

I am a genus of over 70 species of evergreen or herbaceous, low-growing or cushion forming to erect perennials, as well as a few annuals and shrubs. I am found mostly in North America. I am grown mostly for my showy flowers. When I am tall, I make an excellent border plant, but when I am small I am a mainstay for the rock garden. I like ordinary garden soil and to be provided with regular moisture, I am susceptible to two pests. These are red spider mites and powdery mildew.

Last month was columbine.

Hovander Happenings

By David Simonson

As we enter September, many of our vegetable projects have produced and we will begin preparing for wintering the demonstration garden. We continue weekly produce donations to the food bank. Workdays will continue Wednesday and Saturday mornings through October. We will still need volunteers each workday!

Although the vegetable part of the garden is winding down, many of the demo garden projects are ongoing including the dahlia garden, native plant garden, weed identification garden, pumpkins, herbs, and perennials. As you may have noticed the Hovander house is in the process of being painted this year so it has been particularly challenging for Billie Lockwood to work around this project.

This seems to be a good year for the pumpkin project. We hope to have a good harvest on October's "pumpkin day." We will let you know in the October newsletter the date and time for this event.

Tips for Conserving Water in Your Yard and Garden

- √ Hold up on new landscaping during essential times of water conservation, because plants need more water when they're not well established.
- √ Place mulch around plants (2 to 3 inches deep around shrubs and trees) and it will help keep moisture in the soil. Ground bark, sawdust, wood shavings and chips are the best water savers. Peat moss, rock mulches and black plastic are not recommended.
- √ Avoid putting plants in containers because they'll require more watering.
- √ Keep established trees in your landscape. They have extensive root systems that can store a lot of water, making them better able to withstand drought. They also provide shade from the hot sun, reducing water loss to evaporation.
- √ Sharpen mower blades. Grass blades left ragged by dull blades lose more water.
- √ Only water enough to keep plants alive. For example, lawns turn brown after long periods without water, but they will green up again when it rains. For a calculator to estimate potential daily water use of grass go to this website <http://www.tfrec.wsu.edu/Orchard/pET/pETCalc.html>.
- √ Early morning watering is best because the sun is not hot enough to evaporate the water before it reaches plant roots. Evening watering isn't preferred because plants that don't have the day to dry out are prone to fungal diseases.
- √ Soaker hoses and drip irrigation systems are much more efficient watering systems than sprinklers or hand watering.
- √ Make sure outdoor water taps are turned off when not in use. Repair or replace leaky hoses.
- √ Calm days are better than windy to keep water on a direct path to plant roots.
- √ Don't water faster than the ground can absorb the water. Aerating your lawn will help with infiltration.
- √ Infrequently watering slowly and deeply rather than frequent shallow watering produces robust plants that can better withstand drought
- √ Only water when you need to. Push your finger into the soil ½" and if it's moist don't water.
- √ Reduce watering frequency according to rainfall. However, watering during a light rainfall maximizes watering benefits because plants ready themselves for water uptake.

See <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/environ/water/water.htm> for more information on how to conserve water.

Source: <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/environ/water/conservation.htm>

Plant of the Month

Continued from page 4

more sun, the more flowers, and the brighter yellow they'll be. All in all, it's a pretty plant that's well suited to our area. Not too well suited, though, I hope. I must add a warning that the dreaded word "stoloniferous" is applied to this *Hypericum* as well as to its highway relative. I haven't found any warnings that Tutsan has similarly thuggish tendencies anywhere in this country. However, it's listed as a pest plant in western Australia. We know from experience with purple loosestrife and other pretty plants what happens when an introduced ornamental likes a new territory too well. So if you do settle *Hypericum androsaemum* into your garden, keep your eye on it. We don't want to be reading about it in Laurel's column five years from now, do we?

Garden Friends & Foes

Continued from page 5

The presence of moisture ants nesting homes is an indication of another problem, water damage. Solving the cause of water damage will also solve the ant problem. Using insecticides to control moisture ants is a temporary fix to the real problem. Remove damaged wood and replace it with the proper materials that will not encourage rot.

If moisture ants are causing an annoyance around the house, reassure yourself that they aren't nesting in your wood by investigating as described above. Often moisture ants will nest in your yard and come visit your house looking for sweets and other food items. An easy remedy is to tolerate them while you clean up any morsels of food that can be found lying around. WSU's entomologist and infamous ant expert, Dr. Rodger Akre assures us that they will soon leave, once peak season is over. "Here's one case where you just simply get your vacuum out, put on your tennie runners and stomp them to death, or do whatever. Do your bit for the environment and just put up with them for two weeks and they will be gone. Do not spray, it is not necessary."



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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Dates to Remember:

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|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| September 4 | 10 a.m. to noon | Monthly Foundation Board Meeting
Extension Office |
| September 5 | All Day | Master Gardener Advanced Training
Bellingham Technical College |
| September 11 | 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. | Monthly Foundation Meeting
See article for details |
| October 16 -18 | All Day | WA State MG Advanced Training
Port Townsend |
| November 13 | 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. | MG Graduation Potluck |
| Wednesdays | 8 to 9 a.m. | Master Gardener breakfasts
Babe's in Ferndale |
| Wed. & Sat. | 9 a.m. to noon | Hovander Work Parties |