

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

November 2003

Boy, did the Fall weather come all of a sudden! The rain is most welcome, of course. However, the wind is bringing down many leaves to be raked – which ain't easy when the leaves are so wet. I don't know about you, but I like this October weather.

Don't forget to attend the Graduation/potluck at the Ferndale Senior Center on November 13. 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, and at that time we can plan when you can finish your hours.

There are many on-going activities that will be worked on throughout the winter. There are committees working on things like next year's advanced training, plans need to be made for trips, and educational tours, garden tours, etc. We will be preparing for next Spring's training classes. And the list goes on. So, if you are interested in participating in planning or working on any of these activities, join up and give us your ideas.

Thanks to all of you who volunteered this year. This is what keeps this program going. But remember to report your hours to the office – we need to keep track of how many hours are being volunteered.

Good harvesting; see you at the graduation!

Al McHenry

President's Message

Pat Nelson,
MGF President

I think that we can safely say that our hot, dry summer has definitely ended and that our very damp autumn has settled in. Another time has ended—my two years as your president. It was something that I felt unsure of—but, because of all of your help, I feel it was a good two years, and I thoroughly enjoyed it! Thank you to the board, Foundation members and the Extension Office staff!

The new board will be presented at our Graduation/Awards potluck on November 13. Please join us to congratulate those veterans being honored and give encouragement to our 2003 Graduates. Topping off the evening will be Cheryl Kingsley whose topic is 'Below, Behind and Beyond Flowers: featuring Foliage, Texture, Shape and Structure in the All Season Garden'—How did she know that this is exactly what I need to inspire my garden makeover?! I can hardly wait!

We had a little impromptu adventure a couple of weeks ago. My son-in-law, Mark, suggested a quick trip on his high speed catamaran 'Mercury' to Sinclair Island for a short tour of Bob and Celeste Shipp's interesting acreage. I asked if it would be possible to see if a few Master Gardeners might be interested. Karri sent a quick e-mail out and, to my surprise, I got a big response and consequently had to turn people away. Mark said that next season we could do it again with a little more planning—for more people. Keep your eyes and ears open for some interesting Island locations.

At our October meeting, the treasurer's report confirmed the fact that we did well last year. A big part was due to the success of the plant sale—the success of the plant sale was due to all the wonderful plants that you provided—so just a reminder—it is not too soon to get started!

Gretchen White presented the new by-laws, and they were approved. Thanks, Gretchen and committee!

Karen Gilliam presented an Emeritus program—the giving of 'Life Member' status to certain veterans. It was approved. Thank you, Karen and committee.

What would we do without committees?!!

Linda announced that there was an enthusiastic group going to the State Convention. Hopefully, she will be able to get a report in this month's newsletter.

Then, with anticipation mounting, our own Bob Barker was introduced. He gave us a very informative and interesting talk on Genetically Modified (GM) plants. He presented advantages, concerns and disadvantages of different examples—Time will tell!!

Don't forget—there is a board meeting—come stimulate us! November 6 at 10 a.m. See you there!

Two years!—It seems like only yesterday—again thank you all!

Tis the Season



By Faye Agner

October has finally brought much needed rain. Some of it came in the form of fall storms that are signature of this area.

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 weather, it is time to prepare the garden for the winter season.

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. Tuberous 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.

If you don't really feel like lifting your dahlias this fall, try making an umbrella for them out of a thick layer of fern fronds. This will cause most of the water to run off. Be sure to put a rock on top to prevent the fronds from blowing away.

You can still plant your spring bulbs. Mix bone meal or bulb food in with the soil in which your bulbs are to be planted. For added interest and a longer blooming season, you might want to consider layering your bulbs. Plant the bulb at the recommended depths. Start with the deepest bulbs and work up to the shallower bulbs. Also, be aware so the newer blooms do not mask the earlier blooms.

This is the time of year to choose your plants or trees for fall/winter color. You need to see them in color now to know what color they will continue to show in the upcoming years.

If you have picked out your new tree, you need to be able to know how to choose a healthy plant. Some things to look at are; first assess the site of the planned placement of the new tree. Check the drainage of the soil in the area. Dig a hole 12 inches deep and 12 inches wide. Fill it to the top with water and watch how the water drains out. If the level drops more than 3 inches in an hour, your soil is fast-draining and sandy. If the water level only drops between 1 and 3 inches, the soil is loamy with good drainage. Less than 2 inches of water level drop after an hour means the soil is poorly drained clay.

Now that you know what type of soil you have with which to work, you also need to make note of the light and wind conditions. Check the inventories of local garden centers. The experts should be able to tell which of their trees will do best in your garden.

Next, check to see if the chosen trees are root-bound. Look to see no roots are growing out of the drainage holes on the sides or bottom of the pot. Now, press a long-bladed screwdriver straight down into the soil halfway between the trunk and the edge of the container. Keeping it vertical, gently pull the screwdriver outward. If it moves easily through the soil, the roots have plenty of room in the pot. If you encounter resistance, the tree is likely root-bound. Pass it by.

Prepare the hole by digging a hole twice the diameter of the root ball. The type of soil you have determines how deep the hole should be. Clay soil needs a drainage basin around the bottom of the hole. This way the tree won't end up standing in slow-draining water. Make the hole deep enough so the top of the tree's root ball will stand 1 to 2 inches above ground level when it sits on a 4-to5-inch tall mound built in the bottom of the hole. This mound creates a "moat" for collecting the slow draining water and keeps the tree's roots from drowning.

Planting holes for the two other types of soil do not need the drainage mound in the bottom of the hole.

To place the tree, remove it from the container and loosen any circling roots. Lower the root ball into the hole and backfill half way, adding 3 or 4 inches of soil at a time. To make sure the roots are in good contact with the soil pack layers firmly with your foot. Fill the hole with water and let it soak in. Finish backfilling, but use no fertilizer. Use the remaining soil to build up a 4- to 5- inch-deep saucer around the planted area as a water basin. Fill the basin with water and let it soak in, and then add a 2-to3-inch layer of mulch to the saucer. Keep the mulch a couple of inches away from the tree trunk to prevent disease and possible animal damage.

Last step is to stake the tree for at least a year to allow new anchoring roots to develop. Happy Planting!

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!

WHO AM I?

I am from a large genus of about 2000 species. What is called a flower is technically a cyathium, consisting of fused bracts that form a cup around the much-reduced true flowers. Many of my species are succulents; these often mimic cacti in appearance and are as diverse in form and size. One of my species is a very popular Christmas plant.

Last month, bleeding heart.

Plant of the Month By Cheryl Greenwood Kinsley

Florence Fennel

Family: Umbelliferae,
sometimes called
Apiaceae (Carrot family)
Genus: *Foeniculum*
Species: *vulgare* var.
azoricum

Got “fennel” on the list of treats for your Thanksgiving table? Probably not, unless your own roots extend all the way to Italy. This wonderful vegetable—*Foeniculum vulgare* var. *azoricum*—wasn’t featured on the Pilgrims’ menu, but it has been a mainstay in the Mediterranean diet since the 17th century. That’s when this special variety of fennel—*azoricum*, also known as Florence fennel, for the city, as *finocchio* in Italian, or commonly here as “bulb fennel”—was developed from the much more ancient species, *Foeniculum vulgare*. The species—leaves used as fresh herbs, leaf stalks as vegetables, and treasured for its fragrant seeds—was cultivated by the Greeks and Romans and remains widely grown today across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Fennel seed gives Italian sausage its characteristic flavor. It is an essential ingredient in many curries and is used in South Asia as a breath freshener and a digestive aid. Indeed, outside of North America, fennel seed is as much a staple as cinnamon or nutmeg. You’ve encountered it if you’ve treated yourself to an herbal chai lately—or if you’ve used a cough drop, taken a laxative, or sipped any one of a number of well-known soft drinks. It’s even used as an aromatic in room sprays and a masking agent in insecticides.



If you grow *Foeniculum vulgare* as an ornamental, you’re familiar with its feathery look and sprawling growth habit, topping five feet and looking a bit ratty by season’s end. Bronze fennel—*Foeniculum vulgare* ‘Purpureum’, ‘Rubrum’, or ‘Smokey’—has achieved a measure of popularity in the past decade, particularly as a striking specimen to grow amongst roses. If you’ve tried it, you’ll know it’s a perennial that disappears completely by early December, only to reappear in the spring, often alongside its many progeny if you neglected to remove the seedheads—grouped in “umbels”—before they launched their seeds throughout your garden. Because *Foeniculum vulgare* likes the growing conditions here, it tends to the thuggish unless you’re vigilant about removing the seeds and uprooting the seedlings.

Foeniculum vulgare var. *azoricum* doesn’t grow as tall as the species and isn’t as annoyingly prolific. It has the added advantage of forming an oval, bulb-like structure just above the ground that is a most excellent vegetable for your fall and winter table. Recipes using it abound—but just to get you started, you can slice it up raw in your salad, roast it until it’s caramelized, steam it, or stir-fry it. The bulb has a texture similar to celery root and tastes slightly of licorice. You’ll find it in local supermarkets, often labeled “anise,” which it is not. Because it appreciates cool summers, it grows happily here—this past year being a climatic aberration—whether planted in early spring for mid-summer harvest, or sown from seed in July for use straight from the garden well into November. Simply sow it into moisture-retentive soil, in full sun, and be prepared to offer fertilizer during its growth, as Florence fennel is a heavy feeder. Two excellent varieties are ‘Trieste’, maturing in 90 days, and ‘Zefa Fino’, ready to harvest in a short 65 days. Remember these maturity dates are optimistic, given our location, our climate, and cooling fall temperatures. Consider adding at least two weeks as you schedule your plantings, to avoid dashed hopes.

Just **when** to plant vegetables—Florence fennel and others—for late fall harvest is a question that comes up for all of us who are interested in year-round gardening and food-tending. There is no single, easy answer. Seed packets and other guides suggest “Six to eight weeks before first frost,” but that seems a little vague. For a useful formula to calculate planting times as well as other helpful hints, consult the booklet, **Fall and Winter Gardening in the Pacific Northwest**. Written by Pat Patterson, Program Assistant at Lane County/Oregon State Extension, this very informative guide can be ordered in hard copy or downloaded from the Internet by visiting <http://eesc.orst.edu/agcomwebfile/edmat/html/pnw/pnw548/pnw548.html>. Ms. Patterson points out, “The crops need time to mature before cold weather and short days curtail growth; but, if you plant too early, the young plants might wilt in the heat or mature too soon. To determine the time to plant a particular vegetable for the latest harvest, you need to know the average date of the first killing frost in your area and the number of days to maturity for the variety grown. Choose the fastest maturing varieties for late plantings.” Her formula will help you know when to plant for your fall and winter garden. Your own garden records will provide the best historical data about frosts in your particular location, given the varying microclimates in our county; but you can also review historical figures about first and last frosts at different Whatcom County locations by visiting <http://www.whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/comhort/freeze.htm>.

Another excellent reference book is Binda Colebrook’s **Winter Gardening in the Maritime Northwest**, if you can locate a copy of this now out-of-print classic. Armed with the information you’ll find in both of these sources, you’ll be equipped to decide whether to take the plunge and extend your active gardening year well beyond what we’ve come to think of as the “traditional” growing season, from April to September.

Home Hibernators



Multicolored Asian Lady Beetle (*Harmonia axyridis*)



Western conifer seed bug (*Leptoglossus occidentalis*)

Being a bug during the winter isn't easy. Insects have to develop ingenious ways to avoid the cold temperatures, because they cannot regulate their internal temperatures, like we can. Some strategies are to join up with other bugs and aggregate in an overwintering site. Having many individuals massed in a protected nook can increase the chances for surviving the winter. For example, many ladybugs aggregate to form a large mass and hide out in a fallen tree or rock. Individual beetles fidget their way to the center of the mass, where it is warmer and more protected. This proves to be a great feat of nature but is unfortunate when it happens in your house.

A few insects commonly annoy Whatcom County residents every year by their overwintering habits. The most common house invaders are Asian lady beetles (*Harmonia axyridis*) and western conifer seed bugs (*Leptoglossus occidentalis*). A few other types of true bugs in the order Hemiptera also like to overwinter in homes. Most of these are called 'seed bugs' and are in the family, Lygaeidae. Our state entomologist, Eric LaGasa, is watching the movement of a new seed bug that is harassing people in Puyallup (<http://whatcom.wsu.edu/pestsurvey/Alertrhyarochromis.htm>).

Multicolored Asian lady beetles were imported to control aphids in tree fruit production. Now, these lady beetles have spread across the US and cause many people annoyances during the winter. Asian lady beetles come in all different colors ranging from black to red and orange, with as few as two spots or as many as nineteen spots. These ladybugs can be difficult to distinguish from other native ladybugs. In the fall, Asian ladybugs will start to swarm and collect on the southern exposures, often on a nice bright wall of a house. As temperatures cool, the beetles make their way inside through cracks and gaps in windows and walls. Once inside, ladybugs become active in the warmer temperatures bouncing around in light fixtures. Ladybugs can pinch and irritate skin. They also 'reflex bleed' when disturbed, producing an unpleasant smell.

The western conifer seed bug is actually in a family of true bugs called 'leaf-footed bugs,' or Coreidae. This species is a large, robust bug with long legs. As with all true bugs, *L. occidentalis* has a piercing-sucking mouthpart and a half leathery, half membranous wing called hemielytra. This leaf-footed bug can bite (although rarely) and also produces an unpleasant smell when disturbed. As with Asian ladybugs, the conifer seed bug aggregates on southern exposures and eventually makes its way inside through cracks in the wall or broken screens.

With winter just around the corner, I'm sure many of you have already seen these critters lining up to get inside your house. Some simple methods can be used to keep them outside. Seal up any cracks or crevices on your house with caulk or weather strips. Be sure to pay close attention to the southern or southwestern walls of your house. Make sure that windows are sealed tightly and broken panes or screens are repaired. Look closely at your attic and check the screens of the ventilation in the attic. Ladybugs often gain entrance to the house through the attic.

If large numbers are collecting on the side of your house, make life difficult for them. Hose them off regularly or get out the shop vacuum and clean them off the walls. If large numbers of these insects are inside your house, be diligent in disposing of them. Using a vacuum is effective but may cause some short-term odors. Vacuum insects as you find them. In my house, I find them mostly in windows towards the end of the day, and this is where I concentrate my cleaning efforts. If large numbers are in the attic, consider using a black-light trap. Light traps can be very effective for catching large numbers of ladybugs.

It is not recommended to use pesticides inside or outside the house. Using an insecticide inside the house may cause more pest problems. If large amounts of insects are killed, but not disposed of inside the house, other pests like carpet beetles or mice will flourish on the insect carcasses. Using insecticides outside the house is a preventative treatment and may not be necessary. Insecticide applications to outside walls cause mortality in many beneficial insects, just stopping to warm up on the sunny wall.

For more information: see Art Antonelli's PLS 90 and Dan Suomi's PLS 114.

Weed of the Month By Laurel Shiner

Common Burdock

Arctium minus

THREAT: Common burdock is native to Europe and may have been introduced as a food or medicinal plant (leaves, stem and root have been used as vegetables). It was first reported from New England in 1638 and is now widespread throughout the United States and Canada. Burdock spreads by seed, with the dried bur clinging to the hair, fur or clothing of passing animals and people. Each plant may produce up to 18,000 seeds and the seeds remain viable in the soil for up to three years. It is common on roadsides and uncultivated, disturbed areas and can be a weed in landscapes, pastures and nursery crops.



DESCRIPTION: Common burdock is a biennial. The first year plant is a large-leaved rosette, somewhat similar to rhubarb, up to three feet wide. In the second year, burdock grows into a tall, extensively branched plant, 3 to 6 feet tall. The lower leaves are heart-shaped and grow up to 12 inches, while the upper leaves are somewhat smaller and ovate to oblong in shape. The upper surface of the leaves are smooth and dark green, while the undersurface is lighter green and, at least on the lower leaves, woolly. The stem is hollow, hairy and grooved. Burdock has a large, thick, fleshy taproot. Flowering occurs from July to October. The flowers are purple and are borne atop a green bur-like structure. Flowerheads are clustered and numerous. As the flowerhead dries, it becomes a spiny bur, with the hooked spines attaching to any passing hair, fur or clothing (burdock is supposedly the inspiration for Velcro).

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Common burdock can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Plowing or disking will kill small plants; established plants will resprout from the taproot unless the entire root is removed. Hand digging is an option for small infestations, if the entire root can be removed. Tall plants can be mowed to prevent seed formation. Contact the Noxious Weed Control Board for chemical recommendations.

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

Congratulations to David Simonson

During the State Master Gardener Advanced Training in Port Townsend our very own David Simonson was named Master Gardener of the year! Congratulations David!

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.



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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| November 6 | 10 a.m. to noon | Monthly Foundation Board Meeting
Extension Office |
| November 11 | All Day | Veteran's Day
Extension Office Closed |
| November 13 | 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. | Master Gardener Graduation Potluck/
Monthly Meeting
Ferndale Senior Center |
| November 27 & 28 | All Day | Thanksgiving Holiday
Extension Office Closed |
| Wednesdays | 8 to 9 a.m. | Master Gardener breakfasts
Babe's in Ferndale |