

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

January 2004

May the year 2004 bring you health, happiness and good gardening

The time to prune your fruit trees is coming up, and I want to remind you to save the scions for our grafting class. The class will be held in early March. The final details will be in next month's newsletter, so if you have questions contact Luana Schneider. To save the scions you can seal the ends with wax and refrigerate, or you can place them in a sealed plastic bag and refrigerate. Also, clearly identify the variety so we will know the variety we are selling.

In this month's newsletter we are printing the list of Master Gardeners who have been awarded the honorary position of "LIFE MEMBER" in the Foundation. This is the first time this award has been given, so the list is necessarily long. We will review our membership this year to see if there is any outstanding person to add to the list. If you have any nominations of individuals who have performed exemplary service please contact Karen Gilliam, chair-person of the selection committee.

Our past president, Pat Nelson, has accepted a position of Volunteer Coordinator. Each major clinic or volunteer activity will have its own coordinator, but Pat will oversee all of those events and any one-time, or minor, event. She will help match talents with available opportunities. So, if you get a call from her asking what you do well, she will be doing her best match-making tricks. And, we hope, she will contribute to the newsletter a small blurb indicating the available volunteer activities for the coming month. So, you will know how you can perform your mandatory volunteer time.

See you at the next Foundation Meeting.

Al McHenry

Whatcom County Master Gardener Lifetime Memberships

Candace Ambrosio
Robert Barker
Donna Berry
Jill Cotton
Karen Gilliam
Dick Harris
Nancy Henshaw
Christine Hurst
Bill Jennings
Cheryll Kinsley
Merilee Kullman
Billie Lockwood
Dick McClure

Marla Morrow
Penny Nordby
Donna Oehler
Dwayne Payne
Dick Porter
Jean Powell
Vern Reinhart
Luana Schneider
Laurel Shiner
David Simonson
Richard Steele
John VanMiert

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

Now that the holiday season is over, the real catalogs start to appear in the mail. These are the ones with all of the beautiful pictures of produce and flowers you long to see in your own yard. Glance through them, and then put them aside for a rainy day when nothing can be done in the yard. Plan your garden and then get your seeds ordered.

January is the time to begin looking for unwelcome visitors in the yard. Inspect your spruce trees for the small green aphids that caused the previous season's needles to drop. If you find them, check with the WSU Whatcom County Extension for control methods. It is also the time of year to consider your dormant spraying. As a general rule, you will need a minimum of one spray and up to three, depending on your problem. Consult your local nursery person. When you get your spray home, read the label carefully and follow the directions exactly.

Many deciduous plants that bear fruit and flowers in the spring need pruning now and through February. The reasons for pruning are many: to cut off the sick and dead branches that are no longer hidden by leaves; to affect the yield and size of the fruit; to affect flower production, and to improve overall health and form in preparation for spring growth. Some basic guidelines include cutting branches that cross or grow too close together, allowing light and air in. Generally, severe pruning will produce larger flowers or fruit, while lighter pruning will produce more of the above, but smaller. With the winds we have been having it is a good idea to keep watch on your trees for broken branches

that need care.

Must haves for pruning chores include a pair of shears that can be used for general work, long handled shears, also called loppers, and a pruning saw. When purchasing your tool, go for quality over quantity. It will pay you in the long run.

Speaking of tools, on the days you can't work out of doors, that is the time to go over your tools and give them any care they need. Clean and disinfect your tools. Oil and sharpen those that need it. Sand and paint the handles of your tools in bright colors so there are no splinters and you will be able to find them.

If you have roses or trees on your list in your yard plan, now is the time to buy them bare root. Don't buy by price alone. For trees, look for older, bigger, and nicely branching stock. Generally speaking older trees (two and three years old), though more expensive, will bear fruit and flowers sooner than a younger one. And, though you might easily find bare-root plants sold pre-packaged in plastic bags, shop for stock sitting freely in raised beds filled with sawdust. Also try to purchase bare-root before it's grown leaves. These can be planted anytime if the ground is not frozen. They will establish themselves quickly in your garden

Know the signs of an oncoming hard frost. Nights will be still, dry and clear enough to see the stars. In this event, create shelters, move containered plants beneath overhangs, and cover plants that are out in the open. For smaller plants, place a cardboard box with the bottom cut out over a plant; open the top during the day to allow in light and air. For larger plants, use burlap or shade cloth around and over three tall stakes surrounding the plant.

Check the mulch around shrubs and trees and make sure it isn't right up against the stem or trunks. Mice may use the protection of the mulch to eat away at the bark and the cambium. Keep all mulches several inches away from the base of the plants.

Be sure to check that any plants under

the shelter of the overhang of your home have enough moisture in the soil. It is not unusual for such plants to suffer drought damage in the winter. Dig down past the top inch or so to make sure the entire root zones are moist, and if they are not, water them.

Lawns need special care also. Try to avoid walking on a frozen lawn. It may damage the grass. Rake up any fallen leaves that pile on the lawn to prevent suffocation of grass. Scatter snow instead of piling it up on the lawn next to the drives and walks. After a wet spell, inspect the lawn for waterlogged areas and make a note for future remedial action. Don't do anything now as you will do more harm than good.

Rhubarb roots are completely dormant and can be divided to provide more plants or discard the central woody parts and replant young crowns to revive older clumps. Dig over the plot and incorporate plenty of organic with a good general fertilizer. Mulch the plot with a 12 to 18 inch layer of compost or strawy manure. Don't harvest from young plants until next year to allow for strong development.

Remember our feathered friends by supplying food and water for them.

In light of recent world developments, maybe you can find a corner to plant a red, white and blue arrangement of petunias, pansies or sweet peas.

Have a good new year and do the Chinese way and have all your debts paid so you can start anew.

WHO AM I?

Most of my species are natives of North America, many of which are perennial... Many types show wide variation in form, but all have showy flower cluster. The tall kinds are excellent border plants; dwarf ones are mainstays of the rock garden. I grow in ordinary garden soil and need regular moisture. I have two major enemies: red spider mites and powdery mildew.

November was *Euphorbia wulfenii* and December was Primrose.



President's Message

Linda Bergquist,
MGF President

Happy New Year!

Lots of wonderful things are happening!

We have been asked by Western Washington University to work with a group of their students in the Business Management Department who are taking a Teamwork Practicum course. A major part of that course will involve working with a community organization on some type of project that will not only help the organization, but also help them apply the skills they learn. Diane Rapoza and Teri Booth will be working with 4 students this winter quarter (January 8- March 12) because the project they will be working on will be the plant sale!

Also, Marlene Robinson has purchased a laptop computer for the office. We don't have to use Al's computer anymore (I am sure he will be thrilled) and we can take it to clinics, etc. Thanks to all of the plants you brought from your gardens and we sold at the plant sale, we were able to make this purchase. In addition, thanks to your efforts we are able to provide active Master Gardeners (those with 25 recorded volunteer hours and 5 hours of advanced training this year) a complimentary ride to the first day of the Northwest Flower and Garden Show in Seattle on February 4, 2004. Tickets for the show will still be \$15. Guests and non-active Master Gardeners will be \$25 which includes their ticket and the bus.

The privileges associated with being an active Master Gardener are many: Our very informative Weeder's Digest keeps us up to date on all the new and changing things that WSU and its faculty are discovering which we, in turn, can pass on to our community, the workshops that we attend that are organized by the foundation, and of course the wonderful bus trips that take us to places we could or would not otherwise get to see.

Come to our meetings and enjoy a wonderful speaker; by putting your initials on the list at the door you will automatically get credit for 1 hour of advanced training. They are held on the second Thursday of each month at the WSU Whatcom County Extension Office beginning at 7:00 p.m.

More Great Speakers are Coming

If you enjoyed our December general meeting guest speaker from Canada, you will certainly like the one coming in January. Local professional photographer, Mark Turner, has offered to teach and inspire us to take close-up flower shots, color pictures of our gardens, and great landscape panoramas of the lovely northwest Washington. He can show you some of the equipment he uses and will give a slide presentation of the good, the bad, and the ugly. He has been published in several books and magazines and is currently working on a pictorial book of wild flowers through western Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. So, dust off those lenses, count those f-stops and come to the meeting!

Meyer Lemon

Family: Rutaceae (Citrus family)

Genus: *Citrus*

Species: *x meyeri*

Out with the old and in with the new! It's time to move past the spicy cinnamon and fragrant evergreen boughs that brought such delight in December. We're in a new year, and we need something fresh—but still sweet, even though many of us have resolved this month to become lean (forget the mean) gardening machines. How about the scent of lemon blossoms to lift the winter drears?



It's true: I have a hankering to invite a lemon tree into my living room. Many of you know I'm a firm advocate of "right plant, right place" and so you might ask, "Just what business does she have wanting to grow citrus in Whatcom County?" Aren't I always hammering home the idea that we need to grow things that appreciate our climate rather than exotics that by rights should be left to thrive elsewhere? Ah, another of my strong opinions is that our gardening pursuits should always have a little touch of whimsy. I reconcile the two by suggesting that each of us pick our battles carefully. I don't have many fussy plants in my garden; but every so often I'm seized with the wild and crazy notion that I simply *must* involve myself with a botanical diva, a persnickety plant that I know will demand constant attention and lots of loving care. Once, it was a gardenia. Our co-existence was not peaceful and that experience landed firmly in the book of bad ideas. But I'm nothing if not an optimist. So I'm off on my Meyer lemon adventure.



I picked one of the few citrus that has a chance here. Lemons and limes—"acid" or "sour" citrus, contrasted with "sweet" citrus including grapefruit, oranges, and tangerines—have lower heat requirements. I've been told that commercial grapefruit growers, even in very warm climates, frequently leave their fruit to ripen on the tree for up to eighteen months. That's a lot of heat units. Bellingham might not reach the same level in eighteen *years*. But it's not only its relatively stout constitution that persuaded me to grow a Meyer. These lemons—actually a cross between an orange and a lemon—are a fruit unto themselves. Rounder than the common market-variety 'Eureka', Meyers are thin-skinned, more orange, and—to my taste—more flavorful. Still, I'm not going to stake the future of my lemon-pie production on the crop I'll grow in my living room. If any fruit sets and matures, it will be a bonus. The tree is attractive enough—and the flowers are so fragrant—that as a houseplant, a Meyer lemon will triumph over a *Philodendron* anytime.

I'll select a Meyer that's been grafted onto dwarf rootstock, so neither I nor it will face the prospect of its growing into a full-sized, 12-foot tree. Fat chance, but it's good to think ahead. Meyer lemons are also a favored bonsai subject—and yes, they do bear full-sized fruit—but that particular bug hasn't bit me yet. I'll put my grafted Meyer into a peaty soil mix and be prepared to feed it acid fertilizer in the spring. I will keep the soil moist but not soggy—good drainage is a must!—and mist its foliage often, to give it the humidity it craves and to discourage the spider mites that crave it. Comforted by the fact that the Meyer likes the settings on my thermostat—68 degrees during the day and 55 at night—I will put it by a window so it will get as much light as possible, but I'll be prepared to add a source of additional light. I will hand-pollinate the blossoms if I am fortunate enough to see any. I will take the Meyer outside to catch the warm spring breeze—when it finally arrives—and I will be patient when it drops its leaves in protest over being moved at all, in or out, and asked to adapt to different conditions. I will be grateful, as I move it, that Meyers have fewer spikes than other citrus.

I will remember that its relatives have been adored by many before me. It was in 1908 that Frank Meyer, a USDA plantsperson, found one growing in China and brought it home. At that time, growing citrus was a passion in Europe and in some parts of North America. The Victorians really took citrus seriously. In fact, it was the drive to grow these tropics indoors that first led to the development of what we now call "greenhouses" and were first known, in England, as "glasshouses" or sometimes, "crystal palaces."

And yes, if I were truly adventurous, I could grow my own Meyer lemon from seed. However, at least seven years would pass before I had even a chance of seeing a blossom, not to mention fruit. Plus, citrus grown from seed tend to be sickly and spindly and have lots of spikes. I won't take that route, secure in the knowledge that sources for Meyer lemons abound. It seems as if every major gardening publication has featured them in the past few months. I like to think I developed my craving to grow one, all on my own. However, we gardeners do tend to think alike in so many ways, and perhaps *Citrus musthaveus* is afoot in the land and has afflicted me along with everybody else.

I will keep you posted about my Meyer's progress. And in the meantime, I wish each and every one of you the best with whatever you grow and whatever you do in this fresh, new year.

Exceptional Awards.....Extraordinary People



Karen Gilliam is pictured here with a giant gunnera leaf that she crafted with a cement mixture. This is but the latest endeavor that she has mastered. Other garden crafts Karen has become proficient in are hypertufa, carved stepping stones, tufa mushrooms, and twig art. After learning these skills, she has eagerly held workshops for Master Gardeners and the public to teach their methods. This is but one reason behind her winning our coveted John VanMiert Master Gardener of the Year Award, only in its second year of existence.

Karen became a Master Gardener in 1976 and has never looked back. She has chaired or served on nearly every committee in the Master Gardener experience including the Hovander demonstration garden, bus tours and trips, by-law revision, plant sale, life membership, and newsletter. She has held every office on the foundation board at one time or another. She has spent countless hours teaching us about shrubs, perennials and ground covers we can grow. Over the years she led us on many, many tours of her vast and abundant gardens, teaching us from her skills and experiences along the way. We know that she is just a phone call away for help

and assistance of every kind. Karen's willingness to volunteer her time, energy, and knowledge is a credit to all Master Gardeners.

Congratulations, Karen! And, thank you so very much for those hundreds and hundreds of volunteer hours you have given us!

Check This Out!!!

Bus trips are starting in the New Year. Our first bus trip of 2004 will be to the Northwest Flower and Garden Show in Seattle on Wednesday, February 4. We will leave Civic Field in Bellingham at 8:00 a.m. sharp. The bus is always there 15 minutes early for loading. To return home, the bus will leave Seattle at 5:00 p.m. Tickets for the flower show and bus are \$15.00 for active Master Gardeners and \$25.00 for guests. You must turn in your money to reserve your bus seat. We will also have tickets only available (*no bus seat*) for the \$15.00 discounted price. For questions and reservations, please contact Chris Hurst at 360/366-5501.

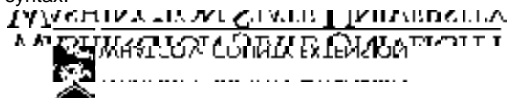
Name Change in the Extension Office

We are pleased to announce the change in our name effective November 21, 2003. With approval of the Board of Regents, we are now "Washington State University Extension." In partnership with county government, we will be referred to as "Washington State University Whatcom County Extension."

If you want to describe the model for delivery inclusive of all the colleges and campuses of WSU, refer to it as university-wide Extension. However, in written text regarding WSU Extension, please do not refer to it as University Extension without the full and more complete reference to WSU.



Weeder's Digest is the monthly newsletter for the Whatcom County Master Gardener Program. Guest articles are encouraged. Please submit typewritten articles by the third Wednesday of each month to Karri at the Master Gardener Office. Articles can also be submitted by e-mail to: karrimac@coopext.cahe.wsu.edu. Editor uses MS Word for Windows and PageMaker 6.5. Any articles prepared on other programs or platforms should be saved as Text Files or Rich Text Files. Editor reserves the right to edit for space considerations, grammar, spelling and syntax.



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Craig MacConnell
Horticulture Agent

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Dates to Remember:

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| January 8 | 7 to 9:30 p.m. | Monthly Foundation Meeting
WSU Extension Office |
| February 4 | All Day | Northwest Flower & Garden Show
Seattle, WA |
| March 2 | All Day | First Day of 2004 Master Gardener Training
WSU Extension Office |
| March 13 (<i>tenative</i>) | 9 a.m. to Noon | Annual MG Grafting Clinic
Tenant Lake Interpretive Center |
| Wednesdays | 8 to 9 a.m. | Master Gardener breakfasts
Babe's in Ferndale |