

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

March 2004

We are ready to begin the annual Master Gardener Training. The first class is set to begin on March 2, with about the same number of students as last year. I believe this will be a very enthusiastic class with many of them ready to volunteer for our projects as soon as they can. If any of the veterans are interested in sitting in on a class or two, please call or check our web site to make sure the class you wish to attend is still on the date scheduled. Sometimes changes have to be made to the schedule. We will try to keep the web site up to date, or you may call us.

This is also the time of year Todd Murray conducts his Crane Fly Survey. He has plans to enlarge the survey area and to complete at least 100 lawns by March 31. He does need to have both members of the new class and veteran gardeners to volunteer for the survey. So, come on veterans, put your name on the list to make a real difference in the use of pesticides. Please read more information about the survey further on in this issue of the newsletter.

If you need information on what you can do to help with the up-coming plant sale, you can call the office, Linda Berquist, or Diane Rapoza. In any case, it is time to get started.

Take note of the March 13 date for the annual Grafting clinic.

Spring is on its way!

Al McHenry

Volunteer Coordinator Update

Thank you to all of you who have responded positively to fill volunteer requests so far. If I haven't called on you yet, I soon will. This brings up another related subject, our new veteran re-application form that you will find included in this Weeder's Digest. As you can see, it will tell us of your intention to continue with the Master Gardener program and then asks for your preferences for volunteer activities, your gardening interests, and other skills. This will greatly help me to know who to call to fulfill our different needs. This form will also be available on our website. Please fill out the form and send it to the Extension Office. In addition, we are asking that everyone have his or her picture taken so that I can link a face to a name and get to know each one of you. Joyce Jimerson will be available at the next meeting with her camera to take pictures. We will try to find other opportunities for those who do not attend meetings. Also, Karri says that if you have a picture, bring it to the office, and she will scan it. Members of classes 2000 – 2003; we have most of your pictures. If you have any questions, I now have a phone number specifically for Master Gardener business 360/312-8306.

Thanks,
Pat Nelson
MG Volunteer Coordinator

WSU Master Gardener Program Purpose Statement

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

Here it is March and time for spring. Bulbs are up and showing buds, crocuses are in bloom, a sure sign that the growing season approaches.

Many of the flowering trees are bursting into bud, forsythia and many others show their bloom. Weeds are also rampant and need to be controlled before they spread seeds. Every weed you pull now cuts down on the work for the rest of the season. Lawns are beginning to need care. If they are spongy underfoot, you need to do a good job of thatching to let the lawn breathe and ready it for the summer. There is sunshine and temperate weather, but still a chance of frost.

Roses are ready for their final pruning, and would appreciate being fed now and every month through out the season with a 5-10-5 ratio fertilizer or a balanced systemic rose fertilizer, which will reduce the need to spray for aphids and other pests. *If you use a systemic fertilizer, do not consume the rose petal in salads even though they are sometimes listed as an edible flower.* If you have added some new varieties to your rose bed, do not feed them until after their first blooming. Now is the time to spray for Mildew and Blackspot. Begin early to thwart these problems before they get a foothold. Look for an approved fungicide, and follow the recommended application as mentioned on the label. The label is not put there to be decorative or to attract your eye on the store display. It has specific instructions that should be carefully followed. I cannot stress strongly enough that **LABELS ARE THE LAW** not only on fungicides, but on all chemicals you use, either in your house or around your gardens and lawns.

Now is the time to plant evergreen trees and shrubs and other bare root all through the month of March. Check on drainage and take steps to control it before planting your new treasures. March is the time to complete the entire late spring pruning, such as fruit trees, raspberries and ornamentals. There is still time for shaping other shrubs. Do not prune spring blooming plants now, but wait until after the flowering is finished. Don't forget to apply the last of your winter dormant spray

Tuberous begonias should be started now to provide plants that are ready to set out in June. Seeds of tomatoes, peppers should be started now to be set out in May. Seeds of annuals, which take 70-90 days to bloom, should be started indoors or in a greenhouse early in March. The quicker maturing ones, such as marigolds, zinnias, asters and others that need only 60 days for blooming can be seeded indoors by the end of March.

Set out strawberry plants now. Try to obtain only certified plants (that is plants that are certified resistant to some diseases) to save you disappointment from diseases. Many times, the new starts donated by well-meaning friends or from nurseries might be infected by certain diseases. Applying fertilizer on your June-bearing strawberries in the spring results in excessive formation of leaves and runners, and produces less fruit. It is important to fertilize June bearing strawberries in late summer (August) to promote maximum fall growth and flower bud formation.

March is the time to sow some varieties of perennials and cool weather vegetables directly in the prepared planting area. These include beets, carrots, lettuce, peas, radishes and spinach. Seeds of flowering plants including arabis, columbine, coral-bells, delphiniums and veronica may be seeded directly into the ground

Keep on top of the ever-present job of cleaning up your yard by removing leaves that have collected over the winter and any limbs that have been broken during windstorms. Keep on top of slugs by removing their hiding places and

putting down bait. Be careful of putting beer in uncovered traps, as the neighboring cats, or other animals find it attractive. Remember that standing water should not be allowed as it attracts mosquitoes.

If the soil is not too wet and not too cold, then you can start spreading that compost in your perennial bed and vegetable areas. Working the soil when it is too wet results in heavy clumps and this is very difficult to rectify into a suitable seedbed. Don't be in a hurry. Enjoy your gardening!



Winter Damage to Plants

adapted from Dr. Ray Maleike, Extension Horticulturist, retired

Winter weather in Washington can be unpredictable. Mild winters may be followed by winters with sudden, severe cold snaps. December 1983, November 1985, and February 1989 are notable examples.

When plant damage is assessed in late spring or early summer, injuries may vary from damaged leaves and flower buds, to damaged stems or death of entire plant tops. Outdoor container plants may have extensive root damage.

We have suggestions for helping plants potentially damaged by cold:

1. Wait until new growth starts in the spring to assess which parts of plants have been damaged.
2. Prune dead or damaged wood back to a bud, branch, or the main trunk. Do not leave stubs.
3. Reduce stresses on the plant during the growing season. This includes giving the plant adequate water, fertilizer, protection against insects and diseases and a good mulch.

President's Message

Linda Bergquist,
MGF President

Spring begins this month, and our organization has been planning events and projects all winter. We are really involved in educating and helping the community to know the best gardening practices, which is the primary goal of the Master Gardener program. Of course, as we help educate others, we learn as well. Here are some examples of projects underway:

We have six Western Washington University seniors: Katie Donnelly, Blaine Fritts, Eric Jacobs, Cameron Locker, Sean Pack and Greg Meyer working with Diane Rapoza on the Plant Sale. They are developing their ideas, which they present to Diane, to enhance our Plant sale results. They have called many veterans and asked them questions to insure that they have the opinions of as many of us as possible. Some of them hope to continue next quarter and attend the sale.

The 2004 class of Master Gardeners has 35 people enrolled. It begins on March 2nd. Go to <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/homehort/mg/program/schedule.htm> to see the class schedule. Be sure to notice the new subjects that are being taught this year. You are welcome to attend any class. You should call the office to see if a schedule change has been made. If you do attend, please be sure to sit in the back.

Jill Cotton, with the help of Marlene Robinson and Roger Mitchell (Kathy's husband), has put together a color brochure about the Master Gardener Program in Whatcom County. We have sent it with a letter to our representatives in the State Legislature. This is part of a coordinated effort, developed by our Washington State Master Gardener Board, to educate the Legislature about who we are and what we are doing.

Our grafting clinic will be held this month on Saturday, March 13, from 9:00a.m.until noon at Tennant Lake in Ferndale. It is open to the public and is definitely a community favorite.

We have veteran Master Gardeners involved in the Youth Fair in Lynden on April 17 at the Fairgrounds. Gretchen White will be in charge of our booth at the NW Washington Fair in Lynden in August. Christine Smith will manage our table at the Farmer's Market in Bellingham, held during the growing season.

Nancy Cleminshaw and Kate Nash are putting together our Advance Training Seminar scheduled for September 24 at the Bellingham Technical College.

All of these community activities are being organized during the winter. For them to be successful they need YOUR PARTICIPATION. Please find an activity that interests you, and call the person in charge.

On a personal note: I would like those of you who are friends of Billie Lockwood to email me bergiesjl@comcast.net if you would be interested in planting a small vegetable garden at her home. This would be done after the plant sale in early May.

Continuing Education Opportunities

During the weeks of March 8 and 14, we will be conducting a series of small workshops on public speaking, press relations, powerpoint presentations, desktop publishing and display creations. The group size is limited with first priority going to our new class members. Any veterans wishing to attend should contact jillcotton@msn.com and indicate which workshop you are interested in. If there are any open spaces, she will notify you. First come, first serve.

Donations

If anyone has a small microwave or small refrigerator collecting dust in the basement, we would love to have it for our new class. Won't you consider donating it?

Tuscan Kale

Family: Brassicaceae/
Cruciferae (Mustard &
Cabbage family)

Genus: *Brassica*

Species: *oleracea*

Varieties: 'Toscano',
'Nero di Toscana'

This is the season when the seed catalogs hold me in their thrall. Over the years, however, I've gradually learned to resist the charms of astounding new varieties of this and that, choosing instead to stay with the tried-and-true. Call me unimaginative, if you will—but also call me practical. I know what I like and what I have time to grow now, in my busy "middle" years. I am particularly fond of cool-season, sturdy greens that make for tasty eating but still hold their own among other, non-edible ornamentals, where I'm likely to plant them. Perpetual Swiss chard and 'Bright Lights' are favorites, but so are the kales. I'm least fond of the very curly, decorative types that sprout up in garden centers every fall. They seem to me to be fussy-looking. But give me the non-curly varieties and we're in business. The two kales featured this

month both have leaves that are slightly wrinkly all over but not fringe-y on their edges. 'Toscano' is medium-green and 'Nero di Toscana' is much darker. They're both beautiful—and full of flavor.

Two crops of kale a year are easy to handle. It's nice to seed them in July, take delight in them as they grow, and then enjoy their sweetness after a freeze. They're less likely to suffer from pests then, too—although kales are generally ignored by many pests that plague other members of the cabbage family. Shhhh. Don't tell the flea beetles or the cabbage worms or the root maggots. What they don't know won't hurt your kale.

Kale is wonderful to eat in the summer, too. For that, plant seeds in May, directly in the ground. You won't believe how quickly they'll sprout. Give them a sprinkling of complete fertilizer after they've formed true leaves, water them consistently—and harvest at will by taking the outer leaves when you need them. Don't forget to build a tasty meal around the seedlings you thin out. Kale is less likely to bolt in our cool summers than in other areas, although your crop planted in May will be more prone to that than the crop you plant in July.

By rights, this time of year kale should be between crops. You wouldn't expect to spot seedlings. And yet that's just what more than 75,000 of us saw at the Northwest Flower & Garden Show in Seattle during the first week of February. Tuscan kale was featured in The Garden of Eatin', the display garden presented by the Garden Writers Association of America to promote their "Plant A Row For The Hungry" program. In addition to kale, the garden contained lettuce and chard and beets and artichokes and sunflowers—in bloom!—and violet beans and scarlet runners—in bloom *and* bearing beans. None of the vegetables looked at all like they had any clue it was February. They were grown from seed and carefully nurtured to perform on a set schedule just for the GWAA garden at the Show, by the Propagation Group of the Master Gardeners of Pierce County. It was an awesome display.

The Master Gardeners started the process last August. They use a greenhouse complex at the Research Station, and they aren't exactly novices. Their Propagation Group starts thousands of plants from seed every year and uses other techniques to propagate thousands more, including roses and fuchsias and houseplants and succulents—the list goes on and on. In addition to selling many at their annual plant sale, these Master Gardeners use their plants and the proceeds from them to support community garden initiatives and several projects to feed the hungry.

The public was impressed with the Garden of Eatin' and rewarded it with the coveted People's Choice award. The Show judges gave it a Gold Medal. The consensus was that it was a "real" garden, one attainable by the typical home gardener. And at its foundation was a very real and worthy purpose.

Those of you who visited no doubt noticed the straw bales bordering the front that were covered with flower and vegetable starts. Master Gardeners here are certain to receive inquiries from the public about how that was done. Rose Marie Nichols-McGee, the designer of the Garden of Eatin', has posted on the Web her inspiration, research, and technique. You can read that at <http://www.nicholsgardennursery.com/strawbales.htm>.

As a member of GWAA, I was able to help just a little with setting up the Garden of Eatin' in advance of the Show's opening. I also had the opportunity to visit with several Pierce County Master Gardeners. I came away with a sense of awe at how the entire Show comes together—ask me sometime, I'll be happy to share what I had the good fortune to see—and an abiding respect for the many people who give of their time to grow good gardens and share their knowledge and talents with others.

More fast-breaking news from the Meyer lemon front. It turns out that more people grow them than I ever imagined! Great stories are coming in. I wasn't able to assemble them in time for this month's column—but check back in April. In the meantime, watch for John Van Miert's book, Garden Sense—coming soon to bookstores and garden centers near you. First appearance is at the Garden Spot Nursery in Bellingham on February 28 at 9 a.m.

MG Whatcom County Crane Fly Survey 2004

A Message from Todd

Dear Master Gardeners,

This year's crane fly survey will be a little different. We are planning surveying 100 lawns all over Whatcom County. To do so, I'm looking for Master Gardener leadership. If you are interested in coordinating annual crane fly surveys, please contact me. It is my intent to make this a Master Gardener activity, lead by Master Gardeners. I will be fully supportive and offer everything that you need. This is a great opportunity to mentor new Master Gardeners and experience the impacts that Master Gardeners can have in our community.

Thank you,
Todd Murray (IPM Program)

Calling all Master Gardeners



- ◆ 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 Whatcom County residents determine their crane fly problems (or lack of)?

If so, keep on reading and come help Whatcom County residents learn about crane flies while protecting our drinking water and wildlife!

What? This will be the 4th Annual MG Crane Fly event. This year's survey will be a little different. We will be not be limiting our sampling to just Lake Whatcom. We'll be trying to reach other communities all over the County. Our goal is to sample 100 lawns during the last two weeks of March.

The survey will involve pairs of MG's going out to homes in Whatcom County 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 week, we will have a training session (see below). Visit the crane fly website <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/cranefly> to see what's involved in sampling crane flies.

When? We will train during the IPM section on March 16th towards the end of class. We will have a deadline of March 31 to reach our goal.

Where? Since this effort is spread across Whatcom County, teams of MG's will organize their own meeting places and times.

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 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 or 676-6736. Or sign up on line http://whatcom.wsu.edu/cranefly/forms/MG_signup.htm

Enlist a Whatcom Homeowner Now!

Please enlist a neighbor to be a participant in our survey. We will soon have many ways for Whatcom residents to sign up for the survey. Visit http://whatcom.wsu.edu/cranefly/forms/homeowner_signup.htm to find an on-line registration form or contact Todd for details.

Weed of the MonthBy Laurel Shiner

Fanwort

*Cabomba
caroliniana*



Threat: Fanwort is an aquatic plant native to the eastern United States, which grows in still to slow moving water. It is sold as an aquarium plant and has been introduced to some water bodies in Oregon and Washington. It produces dense growth that can affect water movement, recreational uses and native aquatic life. Fanwort reproduces by seed, rhizomes and by plant fragments. In late summer, the stems become brittle, causing the plant to break into fragments, which can further spread the infestation. Fanwort is self-pollinating and the seeds germinate readily. It is now illegal to sell this plant in Washington State.

Description: Fanwort is a rooted submersed aquatic perennial, growing up to 6 or 7 feet long. It has finely divided fan-shaped leaves that are dark green or reddish. These leaves are attached in pairs, opposite each other, along the stem, on the submerged portion of the plant. Due to the arrangement of these leaves and the denseness, fanwort has a tubular appearance in the water. Sometimes, there are also small (less than ½ inch), oblong or arrowhead-shaped leaves that float on the water surface. Fanwort has small white flowers that float on the surface of the water.

Control: Like all aquatic weeds, control is difficult and eradication may be unrealistic. To prevent the spread of any of these plants, trailers, boats and fishing gear should be carefully inspected to avoid transporting plant materials between water bodies. Aquarium plants should never be discarded in sewer systems or water bodies. Accurate identification of fanwort is essential before control work can begin, as it resembles other aquatic plants, including some native species. Control efforts can include chemical and mechanical measures, although success is usually limited. Cutting the plants will open up the water body, but does not kill the plant. All plant pieces must be removed from the water as escaped plant fragments will spread the infestation. Bottom barriers can be used in small areas, such as docks or swimming areas, to prevent the growth of bottom-rooting plants. Where possible, water drawdowns may be used to control fanwort, although success depends on extreme drying on the exposed plants and substrate. Grass carp will eat fanwort and may be effective in appropriate sites. Contact the weed board for site-specific chemical recommendations.

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

Master Composter/Recycler Training to begin



Interested in learning more about composting and recycling? Want to make a difference in our community? Consider becoming a Master Composter/Recycler. The six-week training program for new volunteers begins March 31, 2004, and continues every Wednesday evening from 7 to 9 p.m., until May 4.

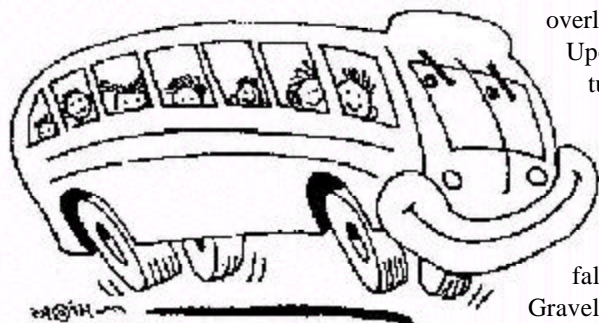
Topics include: composting fundamentals, soil biology, vermicompost and recycling. Hands on components include making a simple compost and worm compost bin, and converting a 64 gallon barrel to a rainbarrel. There are fieldtrips to interesting county compost/recycling operations scheduled for 4 Saturday mornings. We hope to ride to one fieldtrip in an "ecovoyager," a diesel bus converted to run on fry oil.

The Whatcom County Master Composter/Recycler training program, sponsored by Whatcom County and WSU Extension, provides educational programs and support to help increase the amount of yard and other organics composted at home in the county. Composting and recycling have a significant positive impact on our county environment. Protecting the environment begins at home.

If you love good soil, enjoy talking with people and don't mind getting "dirty", think about joining Master Composter/Recycler training. For more information, call WSU Whatcom County Extension office, 676-6736.

Think it's spring ? ? ? Then . . . It must be time for some **BUS TRIPS!**

Just imagine acres of blooming rhododendrons, flowering cherry and plum tree-lined driveways, seas of tulips and spring bulbs, and bees and insects buzzing amongst them all. Sound enticing? Then reward yourself after all those spring gardening tasks and plant sale duties and come join us on our May 17 bus trip to Lakewold Gardens, Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection AND Hammonds Acres of Rhodies, time permitting!



Our first stop, Lakewold Gardens (www.lakewold.org), is the 10 acre estate overlooking Gravelly Lake that Corydon and Eulalie Wagner acquired in 1938. Upon entering, you will stroll under flowering cherry trees under-planted with tulips. Along the way, you notice huge spreads of many varieties of the rare and the usual ground covers, plus a collection of 370 different species and hybrid rhodies. The Wagners were idea and plant collectors. They have a conifer collection, trees uncommon to the Pacific Northwest, and many large specimen trees. Supplement to the trees are many shrubs and Japanese maples. Don't miss the waterfalls splashing into two pools, falling through a native fern lined grotto and eventually ending up in Gravelly Lake. The gardens are maintained by "Friends of Lakewold" through an endowment fund.

Next stop is The Rhododendron Species Garden (www.rhodygarden.org) with 22 acres of one of the largest collections of species rhodies and azaleas in the world. You will be awed by the diversity in structure, size, and flowering habit of the 450 species from the wilds of North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. There is also a great display of companion plants all growing and cohabiting under a forest of conifers and deciduous trees. The garden has a gift shop and plant sale pavilion.

Neighboring the rhodie garden is the famous Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection with up to 50 outstanding bonsai, most much older than either you or I. They are tastefully displayed, along with artwork, under a forest canopy. The bonsai are from China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Canada, and the US.

And lastly, if time allows, we will stop at Hammonds Acres of Rhodies on our journey home. The Hammonds have just over 5 acres north of Arlington totally packed with rhodies and azaleas of all sizes and colors, potted and field grown. They have very healthy specimens at great prices, and you're welcome to check out the whole garden which, hopefully, will still be in full bloom. Their stock consists of new stuff, rare finds, antique selections, as well as species varieties.

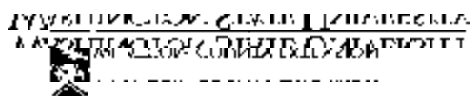
This trip will be on Monday, May 17, leaving Bellingham Civic Field at 7:30 am and returning around 5:30. You will need to bring your lunch, plus something to drink. The fee is \$22.00 for active master gardeners who have put in their volunteer hours for 2003 and \$27.00 for your guests. Please send your money to Karen Gilliam. If you need to call, her phone number is 360/384-4562.

Other bus trips we are planning are a Heronswood Nursery (www.heronswood.com) tour on Bainbridge Island Tuesday, June 22. A July trip is also in the works for Thursday, July 22, to Dig Floral on Vashon Island, City People's Garden Store in Seattle, and Volunteer Park Conservatory (www.seattle.gov/parks/parkspaces/VolunteerPark/conservatory.htm).



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

WHATCOM COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
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1000 N. FOREST STREET, SUITE 201
BELLINGHAM WA 98225-5594



Dates to Remember:

- | | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|--|
| March 2 | All Day | 2004 Master Gardener Training Begins
Extension Office |
| March 4 | 10 a.m. to Noon | MG Foundation Board Meeting
Extension Office |
| March 11 | 7:00 to 9:30 p.m. | Monthly Foundation Meeting
Extension Office |
| March 13 | 9:00 a.m. to Noon..... | Annual MG Grafting Clinic
Tennant Lake Interpretive Center |
| March 16 - 31 | | Annual Crane Fly Survey
See article |
| May 8 | | Annual MG Plant Sale
Hovander Demonstration Garden |
| Wednesdays | 8 to 9 a.m. | Master Gardener Breakfasts
Babe's in Ferndale |