

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

January 2005

May the Year 2005 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 final details on when the class will be held will be in next month's newsletter. To save the scions you can seal the ends 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.

After pruning is a good time to apply winter dormant spray and if horticulture oil is added you can help control both fungus infection and some insects. This mixture is also recognized as organic by most people.

We still have a number of graduation certificates that have not been picked up. Yours is available in the Master Gardener office.

We will be holding Pre-class Orientations every Tuesday and Thursday in January in preparation for the new class. They will be held in the mornings from 9:00 to 11:00 to prepare each student for the new class.

Please continue to volunteer for the office clinic during January and February, because some of the regular volunteers will be helping to prepare for the up-coming class.

The new seed catalogues are coming out now to make us have high expectations for the coming gardening year, so good reading!

Al McHenry

Seattle Flower And Garden Show

Yes, folks, the annual flower and garden show is less than two months away. Once again we have arranged for a bus to take us to the show. We are going on Wednesday, February 9, and will depart from Bellingham's Civic Field at 8:00 a.m. Please be there at least 15 minutes early. You will get your flower show pass on the bus. We shall leave Seattle at 5:00 p.m. to return to Bellingham. You may take your lunch or you can purchase food at the show's food pavilion. Cost for the trip is \$25.00 for Master Gardeners in good standing and \$40.00 for guests. The fee includes a show pass and bus ride. To make your reservation, please mail your check to Karen Gilliam. Need more info? Call Karen at 360/384-4562. Don't delay.

Next Foundation Meeting:

On Thursday, January 13, at 7 p.m., our speaker will be Terri Maczuga of Cloud Mountain Farm. Terri has been manager of retail at Cloud Mountain for ten years and is a plantaholic. She and her husband have sixty heritage apple trees north of Bellingham. In addition, they have 1 1/2 acres of landscape shrubbery, maples, dwarf conifers and species rhododendrons. They also have a 2 1/2 acre salmon creek riparian area where native plants are grown. As you can tell, Terri is very diversified in her plant knowledge.

Terri will present a slide show on Dwarf Conifer.

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

I am back now and ready to go again. Many thanks to all who helped me while I was under the weather. Special thanks to Cheryll Kinsley and John Van Meirt.

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. Read the catalog hype carefully. You may be able to sort out some of the information and get a bit of amusement in the process. As a general rule, add ten days to the harvest time given to allow for our area. Read carefully and enjoy.

January is the time to begin looking for the creepy crawly 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 Whatcom County Extension Office 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. Be sure and cut the branches that grow straight up from the top branches of the fruit trees. These branches are not only unproductive but, left on the tree, they soon shade out lower growth, causing thinning, dieback and reduced fruit production. 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.

Needs 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. It is a good idea to disinfect your cutting tools between each tree or bush so that if there is a disease present, it will not be spread.

Speaking of tools, the days you can't work out of doors 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 for 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 younger ones. 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. Be aware of frost pockets. Hills, hollows and structures all affect temperatures. Cold air rolls down a slope and settles when it reaches the lowest spot or is stopped by a wall. These low and exposed spots are colder and stay cold longer. In this event, create shelters. Move container 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 mulch 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 Asian way and have all your debts paid so you can start anew.

WHO AM I?

I have bold leaves and large clusters of long lasting flowers in white, pink, red, or blue. I bloom in the summer and on into the fall. Flower clusters may contain sterile flowers (conscious, with large, petal-like sepals) or fertile flowers (small, starchy petaled); or I may feature a cluster of small fertile flowers surrounded by a ring of sterile ones. Sterile flowers last for along time, (often holding up for months), gradually fading in color. My colors are affected by soil pH. In general, I come from the Asian countries.

October was cone flower.

President's Message

Linda Bergquist,
MGF President

NEWS for the NEW YEAR

The winter season is here and we use this time to strengthen the infrastructure of the Master Gardener Foundation. We need you to help! Here are some the things we are doing:

Bill Baldwin, with the help of Dave Manning, is planting a World Economic Garden at Hovander Park. The project is a demonstration to educate park visitors in the growth of the five major food and fiber crops grown in the USA, namely corn, cotton, rice, soybeans, and wheat. The World Economic Garden will be near the pumpkin patch and educational signage will explain each plot.

We are developing a Workshop/Lecture Series to be held during winter and early spring. If you have given a workshop, or would like to develop one to be given to the community, please contact me (bergiesjl@comcast.net). This expands one of our main goals as Master Gardeners which is to educate the public. Many other counties have similar programs in place and they have been well received. A Workshop/Lecture Series provides another valuable community service, increases our local exposure, and helps justify our county funding.

Laurel Bliss is looking for new members for the Welcome Committee. Please contact her at (jwcsoft@msn.com) if you are interested. Last year our Orientation Party for the new class members was well received. Laurel and her Welcome Committee have organized this event again for the new training class. The Orientation Party will be held Thursday, February 24 at 7:00 p.m. in the Whatcom Educational Credit Union's meeting room which is directly across the street from their main branch at 600 E. Holly Street in Bellingham. For those of you who are in charge of various Master Gardener projects, or are committee heads, this is an excellent opportunity to meet the new class and tell them about what you do. We also need veteran Master Gardeners to attend the Orientation Party to make the new class feel welcome. It's a FUN event, so come, meet the new training class members, and see fellow Master Gardeners you haven't seen all winter.

The Bring a Smile Committee was created to send a reminder that we are thinking of them to Master Gardeners who are ill, have lost a family member, or are in "need of a smile". If you become aware of such a situation, please call Mary Etta Foster (360/933-1155) the head of the Bring a Smile committee. You can call me, too (360/371-5334), and I will alert Mary Etta.

Nancy Webb (ngwebb@msn.com) is creating a schedule of veteran Master Gardeners to attend each class session during the 2005 class's training. We want to assure that at least two of us are in attendance at each class. We have been told over and over how appreciative the new trainees were when they could ask a veteran Master Gardener a question. If the veteran doesn't happen to know, or is unsure of the answer, (s)he can always get back to the student.

This year, for the first time, one Master Gardener, usually the Committee Head, is responsible for that committee's expenses. They have requested an amount for their respective committee and will keep their expenses to that agreed upon amount. For *everyone* in the Master Gardener Foundation: prior to committing any of your own money make sure that you have approval if you expect to be reimbursed.

We're starting the new year with many exciting, challenging, and fun projects. Don't always assume someone else will do them. We need your help. Please call or email a committee head, or me, and get involved!

Congratulations -


Congratulations to Master Gardener Kendra Bradford and her husband. Kendra, her husband and son welcomed a new daughter, Gail. Gail was adopted in China and is one year old.



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

Reflect & Resolve

No, "Reflect and Resolve" isn't the name of a new variety of my favorite plant. It's the topic of this month's column, the first of the usual twelve I'll write for this space in 2005. I promise you, the others this year and beyond will be about actual plants. But this month I'm taking a tack that's a little bit different.

I've been writing this monthly feature for more than seven years now. Only once before have I deviated from the "Plant of the Month" format to offer a general reflection on gardening. That was in the fall of 2001, and it was titled "Peace in the Garden." This month I've chosen "Reflect and Resolve" because that's what many of us do in the early days of the first month of a new year. We consider where we've been and what we've done, and we make a list of things we'd like to change—or not. We might make a conscious decision *not* to change, and sometimes we learn that continuing on without change can require as much resolve as starting off in a new direction.

So my first resolution is to continue writing this column until WSU Whatcom County Extension and the Master Gardeners here cry, "Enough!"

My second resolution is to review past columns every so often and make note of information I've given that may no longer be accurate. Situations change, in gardening as in life. When I first wrote about *Stevia rebaudiana*, I had to let readers know that this plant simply was not available for purchase in this country. Now it's a new feature in several 2005 catalogs. It's only hardy to Zone 10, but you can buy it as a living plant, treat it as the tender herb it is, and grow it on your sunny patio in the summer. How sweet will its leaves turn out to be? That, I still can't say.

I've learned since I wrote about *Schisandra chinensis* that all parts of this very attractive vine are edible—and rich in Vitamin C. Another of my early columns was about a wonderful plant, perfect for our Northwest gardens, named *Euphorbia myrsinites*. Not long after that, I extolled the virtues of *Buddleia davidii*. Both these plants have turned out to be too much of a good thing. They like our growing conditions a little too well and have become serious plant pests here. Today, I would not only *not* recommend them; I would caution you against adding them to your landscape. I take care now to add warnings in columns about plants with the potential to grow too enthusiastically here. Seven years ago it did not occur to me to check whether a particular plant is included on anyone's noxious weed list but our own. Today I search global and regional listings with care.

My third resolution is to continue to take every opportunity to stay current about the marketplace and about the latest horticultural research, practice, and naming conventions. As a Master Gardener and a garden communicator, I have a responsibility to offer the public information that's accurate, reliable, and up to date—the kind of information that will help them make sensible decisions about managing their home landscapes without causing harm to themselves, the people and creatures around them, or their environment. Our local Master Gardener program offers many chances to cultivate our own knowledge so we can serve the public well. The monthly programs offered by the foundation, the advanced training each fall, and the spring classes for new Master Gardeners are great ways to stay informed. We're fortunate to have them available so we can learn alongside the scientists.

Finally, I resolve to continue to support our Whatcom County Master Gardener program in the ways that I can. Not all of us are able to work in the office on a regular basis, but each of us certainly has enough available time to keep our hours current and devote a few of our individual talents—whatever those might be—to serving the public. That's our charge as Master Gardeners, and it's our responsibility to fulfill it. Here in Whatcom County, it's also a pleasure. Master Gardeners here really know how to have fun while they work. And what work they do! They offer clinics, make presentations, identify pests and diseases, provide sound diagnoses and solutions that work. And let's not forget growing the best vegetables and fruit and flowers around—and contributing much-needed fresh food to local food banks.

Join me in taking pride in our work. Give a little extra time to the Master Gardener program this year. That's one resolution we can all keep in 2005!

Weed of the Month By Laurel Shiner

Common Groundsel

Senecio vulgaris



THREAT: Common groundsel, a native to Europe, was introduced to North America in 1620 as a medicinal plant. It is now widespread in North America and can quickly invade gardens, roadsides, orchards, agricultural lands and other disturbed areas. Common groundsel produces a large amount of seed and can flower at temperatures below freezing. Plants can produce seed within 5 weeks of germination, making it possible for 4 generations to be produced in a growing season. Additionally, flowers can go to seed after the plant has been killed. Common groundsel plants can be self-pollinating and seeds are dispersed by wind, water, machinery, clothing, and animals. Common groundsel contains an alkaloid that causes cumulative, irreversible liver damage in some livestock, especially horses and cattle. The plant is still toxic when dried and most poisoning occurs from plants consumed in hay. Be sure to examine closely any first year alfalfa hay for the seed heads, which will be small white puffballs.

DESCRIPTION: Common groundsel is a summer or winter annual, possibly a biennial. It has hollow stems and grows 6 to 18 inches tall. The alternate leaves are deeply lobed and can be up to 4 inches long and 1.5 inches wide. It has yellow, tubular, often nodding, flowers borne in clusters at the end of the stalks. Seeds are produced in a small dandelion-like puffball. Common groundsel usually flowers from spring into the fall, but can flower year-round during mild winters. It generally has a small taproot, with small, secondary, fibrous roots. Common groundsel grows best during cool, moist weather.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Common groundsel can be controlled through chemical and mechanical means. Hand pulling or digging is effective for small infestations, as long as most of the root is removed. Shallow tillage will kill plants, although it may encourage germination of seeds in the soil. Some groundsel has developed resistance to certain herbicides. Contact the weed control board for site-specific chemical recommendations.

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

Free Training Opportunity Become a Bellingham Backyard Habitat Mentor

We are trained volunteers who educate homeowners on-site about landscaping with native plants, attracting wildlife, and environmentally friendly gardening.

This free training provides 14 hours of instruction on such topics as Habitat Design, Birds and other Wildlife, Native Plants, Invasive Species, and Low Impact Gardening Techniques.

Master Gardeners can receive Volunteer and Continuing Education hours.

Participants commit to conducting 10 yard visits within the year.

Training includes four evening classes and two daytime Saturday workshops.

February 26, 9:00-12:00 (Saturday)

March 3, 10, 17, and 24, 7:00-9:00 PM (Thursday)

March 26, 9:00-12:00 (Saturday)

For more information contact Kendra Bradford at (360) 961-5073 or kendrabadford@earthlink.net.

The Bellingham Backyard Habitat Mentor Group is a program of the City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation, in collaboration with Koma Kulshan NPS, and with additional funding through a Puget Sound Action Team SEED contract.



Dates to Remember:

January 6	10 a.m. to noon	Monthly Foundation Board Meeting Extension Office
January 13	7 to 9 p.m.	Monthly Foundation Meeting See article for details
February 9 -13	All Day	NW Flower and Garden Show Seattle
March 1	All Day	First Day of 2005 MG Training Extension Office
Wednesdays	8 to 9 a.m.	Master Gardener Breakfasts Babe's in Ferndale