

# Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

February 2005

The 2005 Master Gardener training begins Tuesday, March 1. Any veterans who would like to refresh their training may attend any of the sessions. We have included a Training Schedule with this newsletter for your use. Remember, the new trainees get priority seating, so please sit in the back of the room.

Remember to save your scions for the grafting class, and please label the variety clearly.

After the January harsh winter conditions we thought a review of how to treat trees and shrubs damaged by the North East wind, heavy ice and snow or the silver thaw might be in order, so we have included an article by Mary Robson to help you. While we were experiencing the very cold, drying, North Easter I was considering writing to remind you that you should water heavily all your shallow rooted plants such as rhododendrons - - However when the weather changed we went directly to flooding conditions, so much for that idea.

Now is the time to finish your winter pruning and applying your winter dormant sprays. Now is also the time to start seeds for later sale at the plant sale.

See you at the Foundation Meetings.

Al McHenry

## Welcoming Party

Hello to all,

The Master Gardener Foundation will be hosting a Party for the new Master Gardener Trainee Class to be held on Thursday, February 24, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Whatcom Educational Credit Union Education Center - 511 E. Holly Street, Bellingham. Everyone from the Foundation is invited.

Please bring a small plate of finger food - sweet or savory – with appropriate serving utensils, toothpicks, etc. The hospitality committee will provide small plates, napkins, cups, coffee, tea and water.

Plan to arrive by 6:45 p.m. to allow time to set up. PLEASE WEAR YOUR NAME TAGS!!!!

More information about the flow of the evening will be sent to you a week or so prior to the event.

Let me know if you have any suggestions to pass on to the Welcoming Committee.

See you there,  
Laurel Bliss

### **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

**Weather?** Here we go again. What I wrote last year applies to this year only more so. Once again February has arrived finding us battered, but not beaten, by the January snow and bitter cold. It has truly been a mixed bag so far in the new year. After the long, hot and dry summer that put a great deal of stress on our gardens, then to be met with the cold snap in November, and now the cold. The snow may have been helpful, acting as insulating blanket in some cases for the plants.

Don't be too hasty about pruning or thinning out plants that you feel are dead. Give them a chance, they may surprise you and take on a new life. Also, be careful about cutting the plants that have been cold damaged. Wait until spring comes and see what happens.

**Pruning.** When pruning a shrub, first take a good look at the shrub and consider what you would like to see as a finished product. Why are you pruning it? Is it lopsided? Too big? Spindly? Full of dead wood? Then ask yourself, "What can I do to help the plant out?" Next, trim out all of the dead, dying and diseased wood. Remember to cut the branches back to 6 to 12 inches below the diseased areas. A further step would be to remove all crossing and rubbing branches. Then clip off water sprouts, those shoots that grow straight up. Cutting away both of these problems will improve air circulation through the shrub. Now, Stop. Take another good, hard look at the shrub. What's left that needs to be done? Is the shrub still out of shape? Have your goals changed as you've worked? How much more is there to remove? Finish up your task by shaping

the plant. Thin and head back branches to remove any remaining 'wrong way' stems and redirect the shrub's growth. You should now have a clean, well-shaped shrub that still has its natural form. Now, doesn't that look better? Don't prune your *Daphne odora*. It took a hit in the cold. Many of the shrubs have burned leaves and some were defoliated. This damage is typical in cold winters. The good news is that the leaves will grow back. Resist the temptation to cut back hard to make it branch out. That will reduce the number of intensely fragrant flowers and could lead to die-back. Wait to prune until after flowering, then cut only to active buds close to the ends of branches.

Roses need the month to avoid any possible damaging cold weather which still may occur in February. Prune them when forsythia blooms.

Roses need some special help at times. One way of helping is to interplant them with chives, as they deter black spot and help fix nitrogen in the soil. Another couple of friends of roses are lavender and thyme. They not only provide fragrance, they help with weed control and hide the naked knees of rose plants. These herbs do not hog the fertilizer and water, so the greedy roses will tolerate their quiet presence.

**Planting and transplanting.** Survey your landscape and decide any changes you wish to make for the coming year. The month of February is the deadline for moving and planting deciduous trees and shrubs. Planting them later is never 100% satisfactory. It is a good time to plant bare root plants, such as fruit trees and roses. Now you can plant or transplant all deciduous shrubs and trees without being concerned about keeping soil on the roots. However, watch out for damaging feeding roots by exposing them to sun or wind.

**Spraying.** Now is the time to pick a mild, dry morning, and spray for peach leaf curl. You can contact your nursery person or the Extension Office for advice on what to use. Do not neglect your fruit trees or your ornamentals for a spring spray.

**Odds and ends.** If you have not done so already, now is the time to put the grey, wet days to use by cleaning, sharpening and treating the handles of your tools. By painting the handles a bright color they will be more easily found where they have been dropped. Pull any weed you see now, to prevent their spread and keep a keen eye out for slugs and their eggs. Start Begonia bulbs indoors, control moss on roofs and walkways, amend soils with compost to prepare for planting and sprinkle an iron source around yellowing evergreens such as Azalea, Camellia and Rhodys, to green them up without pushing new tender growth. Play a joke on the slugs in your yard. I know you have picked up anything they could hide under to stay cool away from the sun. Put a plank or a stack of dampened newspapers down for them, then lift it from time to time and get them. Be sure to use a type that contains iron phosphate rather than the ones containing metaldehyde, which could be harmful to your pets. One smaller thing. Don't discard your old sponges. Cut them up into one-inch chunks and mix it into the soil of your potted plant. The sponge pieces will hold and store water to buy a bit more time when you go on vacation or forget to water.

### Who am I?

I am a genus of about 250 species annual, biennial and perennials found mainly in mountainous areas worldwide, except in Australia and the Polar Regions. I am grown for my flower spikes, sometimes single and sometimes double. My basal leaves are mostly up to 8 inches long, are toothed and deeply or shallowly 3- to -5 lobed. When I am tall I like to be grown in mixed border or island beds. My dwarf variety is grown in rock gardens. Don't eat me. I will make you feel sick.

Last month: Hydrangea



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## President's Message

**Linda Bergquist, WIN A GREENHOUSE !! (read on to find out how)**  
*MGF President*

### STATE CONFERENCE

The 2005 State Master Gardener Conference will be held at Washington State University in Pullman, Thursday, September 8<sup>th</sup> through Saturday the 10<sup>th</sup>. The theme this year is "Citizen Scientists". More "hands on" lab time will be incorporated into the classes than ever before. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Green from the US Department of Agriculture. Thursday at the Conference is for tours and State MG meetings but no classes. All classes will be on Friday and half of the day on Saturday. The Conference planners are trying to make the conference less expensive to attend by choosing this university setting with more options for food and lodging. They are also aware of the long distances many of us must travel to participate in the Conference.

### 2005 MASTER GARDENER CLASS

Those interested in becoming Master Gardeners in 2005 attended orientation meetings with Al McHenry, Jill Cotton and Gretchen White. They learned about our Whatcom County Master Gardener program and received details about the time requirements, volunteer requirements, and obligations in exchange for the free training. It is now up to us to introduce ourselves to those who have decided to continue in our program and make them feel welcome. The Welcome Committee (Laurel Bliss, Elisabeth Bays, Kathy Mitchell, Linda Lancaster, Sydney Kohlmeier, Linda Marrs and Kathy Hopkins) is hosting a get-together to do just that. It will be held on Thursday, February 24, at 7:00 pm, at the Whatcom Educational Credit Union meeting room on Holly Street. Please come and meet our new Master Gardener recruits!

### STATE BOARD MEETING

Jill Cotton and I attended the State Master Gardener Foundation Board meeting on January 10. The Board announced that a 6' x 8' English Style Greenhouse is going to be raffled off as a fund raiser for the State Master Gardener Foundation. The greenhouse can be installed anywhere in Washington State – that means it could be at your house!! The tickets are \$5 each, \$1 of which will go to the county that sold the ticket. If we sell 1000 tickets we will make \$1,000 for our Whatcom County MG organization and we will be entered into a separate drawing for another greenhouse. The tickets will be sold from February through September and the drawing will be held at the State Conference in September. This gives us many opportunities to sell the tickets to interested gardeners at events such as our Master Gardener meetings and clinics, the Farmer's Market, and our Plant Sale. Both Whatcom County Master Gardeners and the State Foundation will benefit. Start thinking about those who you know who would be interested in buying a ticket to win the greenhouse. Brochures with pictures and details are coming!

### Seed Exchange

Master Gardeners.....  
 Don't forget the Seed Exchange at the February and March Foundation meetings. Seed packets will be provided to help you share your special plants.

### Next Meeting:

On Thursday, February 10, 2005, our speaker will be Jeanne Hager, owner of Bear Creek Nursery, on Samish Way in south Bellingham. When gardeners are looking for the newest, or the unusual, plant they will find it at Bear Creek! Jeanne is involved in all aspects of the nursery including the landscape designs. She was also in charge of the Horticulture Society garden tours for a number of years. Jeanne's main topic will be PLANTING FOR YEAR-ROUND COLOR. She will also bring along her ideas on foiling those browsing deer.

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## Garden Sense Online

A new resource for area gardeners is now on the virtual scene with the recent launch of Garden Sense Online at [www.gardensenseonline.com](http://www.gardensenseonline.com) by WSU Whatcom County Master Gardener Cheryl Greenwood Kinsley. A lively extension of the book Garden Sense, co-authored by Cheryl and John Van Miert and published in March 2004, Garden Sense Online is based on the same simple premise: reliable information about the fundamentals of gardening, combined with suggestions about what to do and when to do it, make for successful gardens and happy gardeners who are empowered in their efforts to serve as good stewards of the earth.

I hope you'll take a look at Garden Sense Online and let me know what you think of it.

Happy gardening to all.

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## Pansy

Family: Violaceae (Violet family)

Botanical name: *Viola x wittrockiana*

My relationship with pansies has had its ups and downs. As a new gardener many years ago, I tended to jumble everything together, sorted only by size. The more color, the better. Mixed-up, in those days, was good. The bright hues and exuberance of dependable pansies suited my taste, and I simply could not get enough of them. I tried to persuade mine to perform past their prime, reluctant to let any plant go.

Then I moved on to my snooty-plant days and eschewed anything “common.” There went the pansies, the petunias, the marigolds, the alyssum—although alyssum, once invited in, never really moves out, does it?

Today, my plant choices are no longer defined by such judgments. I pick what I grow according to what suits my own sense of style, informed by personal experience built over the years. And once again I make places for pansies. Particularly small places—containers of some sort—and particularly at this time of year.

The pansies I buy at the garden center, or grow from seed, never existed in the wild. They're all hybrids, specifically developed for home gardeners around the world, and they come in an amazing variety and three sizes: Large, with flowers 3 to 4 inches wide; medium, 2 to 3 inches, and multiflora, 1 to 2 inches. Each of these categories tends also to exhibit slightly different growth habits. Those with smaller flowers, for example, typically have more blooms, grow closer to the ground, and spread wider.

The many choices we have today in the pansy department result from what some say is the most ambitious and wide-ranging hybridizing scheme in all of horticulture. Others point out that pansies sport such new forms and colors so freely that developing new strains is as easy as letting them grow. What no one can quibble with is the long history of human admiration for the antecedents of our modern pansies. *Viola tricolor*—we know them as Johnny-jump-ups—and other *Viola* species have been appreciated by poets and playwrights, herbalists and cooks, and romantics for centuries. The name “pansy” originates from a word meaning “thought” and evolved to denote thoughts of love. One of the many common names given to *Viola x wittrockiana* is **heartsease**.

The transformation of wild pansies into the modern variety began in the early part of the 19th century, when a young lady in England cultivated some *V. tricolor* in a heart-shaped flowerbed. Nature took its course, the pansies intermingled, and observations of new colors were noted. Shortly thereafter, a nobleman and his gardener embarked on a thirty-year program to bring some predictable order to the proceedings. They bred several species of *Viola* from different regions to create stable varieties for home gardeners and florists. Others picked up where they left off, and today there are more than 300 named varieties of what we call “pansy.”

The plant itself is a perennial, although best grown by most of us as an annual to add sparkle to late-winter gardens. They'll grow in full sun or light shade, and they're lovers of good soil, regular watering, and heavy feeding. Keep them well supplied with a complete fertilizer that's a wee bit heavy with nitrogen. Pick off spent blooms and some of the surrounding foliage to prolong the show and keep the plant from becoming too rangy. By all means, be on watch for slugs. They'll march out from their hiding places pronto when pansies are planted. No other pests are much of a problem, mostly because we plant and grow pansies before our most common pests appear. The one disease you might see is powdery mildew, particularly late in the pansy season, which translates here into May and June.

All parts of the plant are edible. It's not uncommon today to find pansy petals in salads or candied on cakes. Avoid eating too many yellow pansy petals, though. The same substance that gives them that color can cause mild digestive upset in some people. Tea brewed from pansy leaves is said to be a powerful love potion, if you're looking for something along those lines this month. At the very least, you'll be treating your beloved to a good dose of Vitamin C.

Enjoy Valentine's Day, whether the C you have in mind is about vitamins—or chocolate.

# Garden Friends and Foes ..... By Todd Murray

## Drugstore Beetle

**Order:** Coleoptera  
(Beetles)

**Family:** Anobiidae

**Species:** *Stegobium  
paniceum*

### Identification & Life History:

I cringe when a customer or a MG asks me, “What’s this little brown beetle?” I cringe because of the over one-quarter million described species of beetles out there, most of them are little brown beetles! After grinding my way through a beetle identification key for the past few years, I now feel confident that many of these little brown beetles that come into our office are drugstore beetles. These beetles are household/ pantry pests. Other similar-looking little brown beetles that come in household samples to our office are: granary weevils, spider beetles, confused flour beetles, cigarette beetles, saw-toothed beetles and rice weevils. Of these rough sounding characters, drugstore beetles are most common.



Courtesy of Ken Grey Collection, OSU

Drugstore beetles come from a large beetle complex of families called the Bostrichoidea that are all very difficult to identify, even to the trained eye. Adults are little reddish-brown beetles about 1/8 inch long. The head is almost totally concealed from view when looking down at the beetle’s back. When viewing from the side, you can see that the head is tucked underneath the prothorax (the segment behind the head) giving it a hunch-backed appearance. The over-all body shape is oval. The head, prothorax and elytra (wing covers) of drugstore beetles are covered in tiny, fine hairs, which are arranged in rows on the wing covers. The larvae are c-shaped, creamy white grubs with a dark head capsule.



Courtesy of Ken Grey Collection, OSU

The length and timing of the lifecycle for drugstore beetles is dependent on food and temperature. The complete lifecycle can range from two to seven months long. After mating, females lay up to 75 eggs. The newly hatched larvae feed for two to twenty months, depending on the environmental conditions. Pupation lasts for two to three weeks. Adults can live quite long, up to 65 days.

### Damage & Monitoring:

The drugstore beetle is a cosmopolitan, junk food junkie. A more appropriate name would be the kitchen sink beetle, or the pig beetle, or better yet, the goat beetle, because they eat everything! It got its name because it can be found infesting prescription drugs. Drugstore beetles commonly feed on dried, stored products like: flour, dry mixes, chocolate, spices, dried herbs, cookies, stored grains and

dried fruits and vegetables. Other edible items that this beetle has been found feeding on include: wool, leather, horns, hides, books, and wood. More amazing food items include drugs, toxins, such as strychnine powder, and tin cans! Much like wood-eating organisms, drugstore beetles contain symbiotic yeast that helps them digest these ‘food’ items. This yeast can produce complex nutrients such as B vitamins that make it possible for this beetle to eat junk.

Because they can survive with such interesting diets, an infestation can be difficult to get rid of if these beetles go unchecked for some time. Watch for accumulation of beetles at windowsills. Most samples coming into the office are from curious customers who collected adult beetles from windowsills in autumn. Look for adult beetles in stored food products regularly. Monitoring for the grubs is difficult due to their small size and secretive habits. The most common discovery of drugstore beetles in the grub stage is following the bad taste from your spoonful of morning cereal. Regularly check boxed cereals, mixes and grains, for small shot holes chewed through the sides. Look for small piles of dust and debris coming from containers and bags. If you are serious about monitoring drugstore beetles, pheromone traps and lures can be purchased.

### Management:

Pesticides are not generally recommended or needed to remedy a drugstore beetle infestation. If the infestation were bad enough to warrant an insecticide, it would be worth calling a professional. Most infestations can be managed by diligence. Careful shopping, cleaning and food storage habits will rid you of your pantry pest problems.

*Continued on next page*

## Paterson's Curse

*Echium plantagineum*



**THREAT:** Patterson's curse, also called salvation Jane or purple viper's bugloss, is native to the Mediterranean region of Europe and North Africa, and has been introduced as a garden ornamental or seed contaminant. It has become a major pasture weed in Australia and was found in Oregon in 2003. Paterson's curse invades pastures, roadsides and disturbed areas. This adaptable plant will grow under a wide range of environmental conditions, is drought tolerant, and can germinate year round, if conditions are favorable. Each plant produces large quantities of seed (up to 5000 seeds per plant), which can last up to at least 6 years in the soil. Seeds are dispersed by water, by clinging to the hair of animals and by movement of contaminated soil and animal feed. Seed can also pass through the digestive system of animals unharmed. The plant is poisonous to livestock, causing liver damage, leading to a loss of condition in animals, and, in severe cases, death. Pigs and horses are most susceptible to poisoning, followed by cattle, while sheep and goats are much less susceptible. The hairs covering this plant can cause skin irritation in some people, and the pollen can cause allergic symptoms. In Australia, Paterson's curse has become resistant to some herbicides.

**DESCRIPTION:** Patterson's curse is an annual (sometimes a biennial) in the borage family. The plants usually germinate in late summer or early fall, producing a long taproot, and overwinter as a rosette of basal leaves. In the spring the plant produces erect, branched flowering stems, 8 inches to 3 feet tall. Basal leaves are oval or elongated in shape and 4 to 12 inches long, while stem leaves are smaller and narrow. Leaves and stems are covered with small stiff hairs. The 3/4 to 1 1/4 inch long tubular

flowers are usually bluish-purple in color, but may occasionally be white or pink. The flowers grow on one side of a curled flower stalk. Flowering occurs in spring but can occur throughout the growing season if ground disturbance allows for germination of new seeds. Plants die after flowering.

**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Patterson's curse can be controlled using mechanical and chemical means. Cultivation will kill existing plants but may encourage germination of seeds. If plants are dug or cut, flowerheads should be destroyed as the seeds may still develop on the dead plant. Some biological control agents have been used in Australia, with some success. 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*

## Garden Friends & Foes

*Continued from previous page*

If free-living adults are found, look for potential food items in your pantry. Once the food item is found, throw it out if it is heavily infested. Closely inspect other food items. Questionable food items can be temperature treated by freezing them for a few days or heating them to 120-130° F for a few hours. Heat to 180°F for faster results. Take care in temperature treating food items; you may ruin the product. Do not store dried food items exposed. Food items should be stored in airtight containers. Clear plastic Tupperware containers are good to use to monitor future beetle infestations. This storage practice should be used when buying bulk food items that will be around for a while in your pantry.

Thoroughly clean areas where food is stored. Pay attention to hard to reach places where food crumbs can accumulate. Do not store pet food in areas that are close to your pantry. Many dried pet foods harbor drugstore beetles, along with other pantry pests. Store pet food in airtight containers in the garage or outside. This storage practice should be used when storing birdseed, a great source for Indian meal moths. Many times, just by inspecting products at the store before you buy them can prevent infestations. I believe that this is the most common way for beetles to make it to your home. With an attentive eye, a little foresight and some diligence, drugstore beetle problems can be easily remedied or avoided. I've had college roommates with similar diets but were much harder to get rid of.



## Checking Trees for Winter Problems

No endorsement of products or information at these sites is implied.

Mary Robson Area Extension Agent

Regional Garden Column January 20, 2001

Gray winter days can invite us into the garden for deep breaths of clean air. While walking about, look closely at trees and shrubs for possible damage or pest problems.

**Branch damage:** Have winter storms cracked branches? While trees are leafless, check for cracks, ripped branches, or branches crossing and rubbing others. Remove these now with sharp pruners or a good saw. Don't leave jagged bark or pruning cut stubs. Dealing with damaged branches is even more important than shaping the tree or shrub for aesthetics.

**Bark cracks:** Winter temperature extremes will sometimes cause longitudinal bark splits or cracks. This often happens on the south facing side of newly-installed trees. Bark splits commonly occur on maples, apples, beeches, walnut, and willow as well as other trees. If the newly-planted tree is protected by shrubbery or other trees, damage will be lessened. Solitary trees with full sun exposure are most susceptible. Using tree wrap around newly-planted trunks for the first few years of life helps to protect trees in vulnerable situations.

Trees that do develop splits will adjust to them as to other wounds; callus tissue may gradually form, and the plant may stabilize as the split heals. Adjustment depends on severity and how well established the tree is. Be sure to watch such trees through the summer and don't allow them to endure drought while they are recovering.

**Normal bark may also give evidence of shedding or splitting:** Some trees naturally have shaggy or "peeling" bark, with furrows as the trees grow. This isn't damage and shouldn't be confused with the deep, single splits that weather may cause. Trees with rough or peeling bark, particularly as the trees grow older, include mulberry (*Morus rubra*), Tibetan cherry (*Prunus serrula*), black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), and London plane (*Platanus x hybrida*). The bark effects contribute to the beauty of many trees in winter.

**Problems on blue spruce and other spruce:** Blue spruce trees (*Picea pungens* 'Glauca') and all other spruce grown in western Washington suffer from insect problems. The most common difficulty is spruce aphid (*Elatobium abietinum*). Spruces, including Englemann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*) and dwarf Alberta spruce (*Picea glauca* 'Conica') are frequently planted in landscapes. The trees, when healthy, offer crisp "Christmas-tree" shapes with vibrant green or blue-green needles. Many of these spruces thrive in cold winter climates, and are classic parts of Rocky Mountain and Appalachian flora.

Spruce aphids do their nasty work in mid-winter, when the small, almost invisible, green aphids feed on the needles. If you have spruce trees, check the growth from January through late February. A good way to look for spruce aphids is to hold a piece of white paper under the branch and tap it. The insects will fall off onto the paper like small greenish specks, moving.


If a determined gardener wishes to grow spruce and wants to get some control for the spruce aphid problem, the WSU recommendation is to spray now during winter when the insects are active. The least-toxic materials registered for the problem are horticultural oils or insecticidal soaps. Be sure to get thorough coverage of all needles, and apply on a dry day. It's impossible to treat this problem during summer when you may see needles dropping off the spruce. Also, be aware that horticultural oils will discolor the blue needles of Colorado blue spruce, turning them a muddy green.



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:

February 3 .....	10 a.m. to noon .....	<b>Monthly Foundation Board Meeting</b> Extension Office
February 5 .....	All Day .....	<b>Spring Field Day</b> NW WA Research and Extension Cntr.
February 9 .....	All Day .....	<b>NW Flower &amp; Garden Show Bus Trip</b> Seattle
February 10 .....	7 to 9 p.m. ....	<b>Monthly Foundation Meeting</b> Extension Office
February 24 .....	7 to 9 p.m. ....	<b>Welcoming Party for new MG's</b> WECU Education Center, 501 E Holly St.
March 1 .....	All Day .....	<b>First Day of 2005 MG Training</b> Extension Office
March 5 .....	9a.m. to Noon .....	<b>MG Open Grafting Class</b> Tennant Lake Interpretive Center
Wednesdays .....	8 to 9 a.m. ....	<b>Master Gardener Breakfasts</b> Babes in Ferndale