Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print

Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners **March 2005**

We are ready to begin the annual Master Gardener training. The first class is set to begin Tuesday, March 1, with 43 students signed up. That number of students will crowd our classroom, so if you would like to attend any of the sessions please get there early because there won't be an easy way to get to the back of the room without totally disrupting the class. We still hope you will come and interact with the new students while getting refreshed on some of the subjects.

If you are interested in coming to any of the classes please call or check our web site to see if any changes have been made to the schedule. That way you are sure to attend the class you are most interested in.

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

Come to the Grafting Class on Saturday, March 5!

Al McHenry

Whatcom County Watershed Steward Program

The highly acclaimed and nationally recognized "Beach Watcher" program begun by Washington State University Extension in Island County fourteen years ago is now coming to WSU's Whatcom County Extension! In Whatcom County it will be a watershed steward program because our version of this program will cover everything in our area from the mountaintops to the depths of our marine waters.

The focus of the program will be water resources and will include topics such as local watersheds, streams and lakes, groundwater, marine biology and oceanography, salmon and their habitat- including the marine nearshore, climate change, noxious weeds, agriculture, forestry, sustainable living, native plants and wildlife, intertidal monitoring, coastal geology, and more.

The format of the program is similar to the Master Gardener program because participants will attend 100 hours of free university-level training about the Whatcom County environment and associated issues, and in return will devote the same number of hours back to the community in a manner most appropriate to their interests and abilities. A new volunteer coordinator will help organize these activities.

The first annual class will begin with 18 participants on April 6 and will be held on Wednesday and Friday for 8 weeks. Applications will be accepted until March 18.

The program does not advocate any particular point of view, and enforcement, or monitoring others for compliance with rules and regulations, is not any part of the program.

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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

It looks as though we are having an early spring. The warm weather in February has been unusual to say the least, nice, but unusual. Hopefully it is not a false spring with some surprises along the way. Lots of pretty flowers are out now, as are the slugs. Get on them so they don't get ahead of you. Be sure to remove any hiding places for them. Check under boards, piles of leaves or any place that is dark and moist during the day light hours. In my yard, they are even eating the weeds.

This is the best time to add farmyard manure or compost to the garden as the nutrients will be present for the new growth. If added in the autumn a lot of the "goodness" is leached away over the winter, particularly the nitrogen. If barn yard manure is used, it is best if it is well rotted so it does not burn the new growth.

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 rampart 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.

For those who thought gardening by the moon was just an old wives tale, research is showing that at least some of it makes sense scientifically.

Since the moon affects the tides and the atmosphere, therefore affecting the weather, it only makes sense that there is a certain rhythm to weather patterns. And gardeners are always looking for ways to use the weather to their advantage.

There are hundreds of rules to follow in gardening by the moon—and some of them seem to contradict each other. But here are a few general principles to get you started.

Everyone seems to agree that the best time to plant vegetables and flowers that bear fruit and flowers above ground is when the moon is waxing—the time between a full and a new moon.

The lunar cycle can be divided into quarters, with the first two quarters occurring when the moon is waxing and the last two when it's waning. Some folks narrow down the principle we explained even further: The third quarter is the time to plant bulbs and below ground crops and the fourth quarter is a time to rest or to do non-planting work, such as weeding.

Whether or not you choose to believe that the moon influences the way your garden grows, organizing your chores into a schedule is a good idea. And who can disagree with a plan that even builds in a time for rest?

To start your begonias, plant the tubers in shallow wooden box or flat, "cup side up". If you are planning to pot your begonias, start them directly in their containers. Plant 1 tuber per 6 inch pot and 3 tubers per 8"-10" pot. If sprouts are broken off, don't worry, more will follow.

Use moist peat moss (4 parts) and vermiculite (1 part) or a prepared planting mix. Put about 3 inches of the planting mix in the flat, place the tubers on the planting mix, cup side up, in the flat, and cover with about ½ inch of the planting mix and water thoroughly. Place the flat where it will have good light, but not in direct sun. The temperature should be about 65-70 degrees. Keep the mixture moist to the touch but never soggy. Do not fertilize during this early growth stage. Be patient during this starting period after dormancy, begonias normally require 2 to 3 weeks to begin growing. Once they have started they will grow quickly. When the sprouts are 3 to 4 inches tall and have developed their third leaf they are ready to move outdoors as long as all danger of frost is passed. Begonias take about 10 – 12 weeks from starting until bloom.

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 for completion of the entire late spring pruning, such as fruit trees, raspberries and ornamentals. There is still time to shape 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

Seeds of tomatoes and 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.

Things and stuff: 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 of diseases. Now 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 . Remember that standing water should not be allowed as it attracts mosquitoes.

Keep the soil moist and give your fall planted garlic a shot of fishmeal now and you will get bigger cloves in the summer Remember: It's chic to reek—eat homegrown garlic!

Enjoy your gardening!

President's Message

Linda Bergquist,
MGF President

A NEW CROP

March 1 is the first day of class for 43 people interested in becoming Master Gardeners. We all remember our first day. We left home early to be sure we were on time. Many of us hadn't been in a classroom in what seemed like forever and wondered how we could sit still that long without falling asleep! We were sure we'd never be able to remember all the wonderful information we were being given. Thankfully, we all survived and have many stories to tell about our class. Each class has its own personality, filled with very special people who wish to serve the community through their love of gardening. Our mission statement says "The WSU Master Gardener Program is a public service program that provides university training to volunteers for the purpose of enabling them to serve their communities through horticulture." Please, take the opportunity to come to a training class this year. Use it as a chance to get a refresher course in a subject you are interested in and to meet the new crop of trainees. Let them feel your enthusiasm for the program, answer their questions about your favorite area of interest, and let them know what an interesting, knowledgeable, and helpful group of people they have joined!

IT'S JUST MAGIC

Do all the beautiful flowers in your garden appear just by magic? I thought not. You plan, you work hard, and then you follow through. Few people see all that – they just enjoy the fantastic results. It's much the same with the many Master Gardener events we have each year. Veteran Master Gardeners plan, work hard, and follow through on organizing events for the gardening year. Some current examples:

Luana Schneider and her committee are hosting the Grafting Seminar on Saturday, March 5, starting at 9:00 a.m. at Tennant Lake in Ferndale. Tell your friends about this informative and fun event. Participants will take home a fruit tree they have grafted!

The Greenhouse Committee decides on the best plants to grow for the plant sale. Jean Powell and Chris Hurst have a great group of people that are excited about growing things in a greenhouse environment. They also take care of the outside plants we all contribute from our gardens that are waiting for some warmer weather to flourish. They are so organized that they already have a watering schedule!

Diane Rapoza and Teri Booth have already started Plant Sale preparations. Advertising is a key factor in the success of our Sale and publication deadlines must be met far in advance.

Loretta Hogg, Kaye Dykas, and their Training Committee are searching for excellent presenters for our Advanced Training Day in September. The Committee needs to contact speakers now to ensure that we get the best ones.

Remember, "The WSU Master Gardner program is more than a horticulture class or a garden club, it is a volunteer program the enables participants to serve their communities through horticulture."

Who am I?

~Faye Agner

I am a native of Europe. I can be used as planting in rockeries or as a ground cover. When I am used as a ground cover, you have to watch me so that I don't take over your lawn. I spread by runners and tend to be invasive. I bloom in early spring and summer with a blue flower. My leaves are dark green and form a mat I flourish either in full sun or in partial shade.

Last month was delphinium.

Become a Master Composter/Recycler!

7-9 PM, Wednesdays
March 30– May 4

Learn about composting and building your soil. Get worms to work for you. Find out what Whatcom County is doing about recycling, and visit fascinating compost and recycling facilities. Join other trained volunteers to provide advice and leadership about resource conservation throughout the county when you become a Master Composter/Recycler!

To sign up, call WSU Whatcom County Extension, 360/676-6736 or by e-mail joycej@wsu.edu, website: http://whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/compost

Next Meeting:

Our speaker for the March general meeting is Susan Harrison of Private Garden Design, Inc. of Bellingham. Susan is a lifelong gardener and hands-on designer and is known locally for award-winning designs that contain intricate stonework and an extensive plant palette. She is actively involved in all phases of the design and construction of each of her projects. Susan is a graduate of the Master Gardener program. Her topic is "What is a Garden? Landscape Design for the Discerning Horticulturist"
Examples of her work can be seen at http://www.nas.com/~privategardn/.

Plant of the Month ..... By Cheryll Greenwood Kinsley

Coralberry, Indian currant

Family: Caprifoliaceae (Honeysuckle family)
Genus: *Symphoricarpos*
Species: *orbiculatus*

Courtesy Missouri Botanical PlantFinder

There were many interesting things to see at the recent Northwest Flower & Garden Show, and people were there in droves, notebooks in hand, to record the names of plants that caught their individual fancy. One small shrub tucked into the front border of a featured display garden, right next to a *Viburnum tinus* 'Spring Bouquet', attracted quite a bit of attention. It was leafless, but showed clusters of rose-pink berries along its nicely shaped, bare stems. Alas, it was not labeled and didn't appear on the plant list for the garden. A small gaggle of visitors gathered around it, and conjecture ensued. Someone suggested it might be a species of *Callicarpa*, and someone else agreed: yes, it was certainly a beautyberry. Pencils scratched against paper. Then a third someone headed to the side of the garden, found another of the small shrubs, and read its label aloud: *Symphoricarpos orbiculatus.*

An Eastern cousin of our common native snowberry, *S. orbiculatus* has been used in gardens in other regions since the 18th century. It is one of the fewer than 20 species of *Symphoricarpos*, and like most of them, hails from North America. (The one international cousin is native to China.). The genus is characterized by those "berries"—they're actually "drupes"—and the name *Symphoricarpos* derives from the way they tend to be grouped in clusters along the branches. *S. orbiculatus*, known commonly as coralberry or Indian currant, is native to eastern North America, with its range extending as far east as Nebraska and as far south as Mexico. It is particularly widespread in Oklahoma and Texas. Virginia Tech classifies it as a "very common and difficult-to-control weed of pastures, hay fields, and roadsides that is found primarily in the piedmont and mountains of Virginia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky." Once again, a plant that's a weed in one region is presented as a gardener's treasure in another.

S. orbiculatus offers small-but-pretty flowers in summer and grayish green leaves that are a trifle coarse. Its bark is attractive, starting out greenish-brown and aging to a nice reddish-brown with finely shredded peelings that add visual interest. You can expect this shrub to stay less than four feet tall and have an arching habit; but remember it is in the same family as *Abelia, Kolkwitzia, Lonicera, Viburnum,* and *Weigela*. Know it will be twiggy and can spread by underground stems into a thicket if it's grown in a place it likes. The tidy examples at the show were very young and, I suspect, carefully groomed to remove dead leaves and pruned to retain a sparse look and an open form that the one growing in your garden won't have unless you shape it regularly and severely.

The berries always start out white and deepen in color as they age through the fall, although they're likely to be paler in color on a *S. orbiculatus* grown in a Pacific Northwest garden than on one grown in its native range. They tend to be pink here, instead of the deep purplish red they display in the East. Our own native pests haven't developed a taste for it yet; although if other members of its family are under assault, you can expect coralberry to be victimized, too. It seems to be prone to powdery mildew in late summer when grown in the garden here, just like its snowberry cousin, although immune to it when grown in the wild. *S. orbiculatus* does well in sun or light shade, prefers soil on the alkaline side—a reminder of its non-native status—and its drought tolerance is rated as "medium."

S. orbiculatus is noted in many sources as attractive to birds but if so, why do those berries hang on all winter? Their color is a nice touch in the garden, but they also contain saponin, a natural detergent that is one of the many good-news/bad-news items of the plant kingdom. Digitalis is a form of saponin, for example, used on the one hand to treat heart disease and on the other as a poison lethal enough to tip arrows and spears used in hunting. We know not to nibble on foxglove. We also know deer won't eat our snowberries, although bears are said to be fond of them. Suffice it to say that *S. orbiculatus* berries and leaves are mildly toxic in small quantities and can cause digestive upset in humans and small mammals. Coralberry also is reported to cause mild sedation, which might explain its use by indigenous people as a treatment for eye pain. Its dried roots, dubbed Devil's Shoestrings, were used by some Eastern North American tribes to stun fish for collecting and eating.

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

PEST ALERT: Daylily Midge

Order: Diptera
Family: Cecidomyiidae
Species: ***Contarinia quinquenotata***

The daylily midge, also known as the Hemerocallis gall midge, is a common, yet little understood pest of daylilies grown in central Europe. In 1989, the daylily midge had spread to Britain where it continues to spread. In 2001, gardeners and commercial daylily producers in Vancouver, British Columbia were disappointed with their daylily blooms. Upon further investigation, little tiny white maggots were found in the distorted flower buds. This pest of daylilies is NOT known to occur in Whatcom County or Washington State, yet.

Fig 1. Normal bud above. Two infested buds below. (photo from http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/daylilymidge.htm)

Description: The daylily midge adult is a small, nondescript typical gnat. I'm not sure if I could tell this midge from others in our area. Adults emerge from the soil in spring and begin mating and flying. Female flies seek out the developing flower buds of daylilies to lay eggs. In Europe, daylily flower buds are susceptible from mid-May to early July. Eggs hatch in mid-spring to early summer. Larvae feed on the developing flower parts inside the bud causing deformation of the bud. Larvae are cream colored maggots about 3mm long when mature. The unopened flower bud eventually detaches from the stem and drops to the ground. Larvae enter the soil to pupate and wait out winter until next spring.

Damage & Monitoring: Early flowering yellow daylilies are most susceptible while late flowering daylilies can avoid infestations. Look for deformed buds with discoloration in spring. Examine buds for small maggots. An infected bud can contain anywhere from 1 to 300 maggots; however, one daylily grower in BC, Pam Erikson, mostly finds 5-50 larvae per bud. Pam Erikson also describes that swollen buds can be quite obvious, shaped like golf balls or in triangles.

Fig. 2. Infested bud with maggot indicated by arrow. (photo from http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/daylilymidge.htm)

Management: Europeans have avoided early flowering daylilies and regularly removed deformed buds to keep this pest at bay. This tactic also appears to be working for British Columbians. Through diligent removal of suspect buds and planting resistant varieties (later varieties), daylily midge populations can be lessened in gardens.

To date, the Daylily midge has not been identified in Whatcom County or Washington State. However, the pest is widely distributed throughout the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. If you find suspicious daylily buds that you believe may be infested with larvae this spring, please collect them and submit them to the Master Gardener clinic. You could be the first unlucky gardener on your block to have daylily midges!

To learn more about the Daylily Midge visit these websites:

Pest Alert from B.C. Ministries of Agriculture, Food & Fisheries
http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/daylilymidge.htm
Great article by Pam Erikson
http://www.plantlovers.com/daylily/news/
Information from the Royal Horticultural Society of England
http://www.ncf.ca/~ah748/rhs.html

Weed of the Month ..... By Laurel Shiner

Water Caltrop & Water Chestnut

Trapa bicornis & *Trapa natans*

Water Chestnut
Drawing courtesy: USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. ***Illustrated flora of the northern states and Canada*. Vol. 2: 612.**

THREAT: Water caltrop and water chestnut are closely related aquatic plants native to Asia. Water caltrop, also called ling, horn nut, giant mosaic plant, devil pod and bat nut, is considered by some to be an agriculturally derived variety of water chestnut (not the water chestnut commonly used in cooking). Both plants can be invasive in still or slow moving freshwater; water chestnut has also been found in freshwater areas of estuaries. Water caltrop and water chestnut can form a thick mat of vegetation on the water surface, affecting native plants and wildlife, as well as impacting recreational uses and water quality. Plants can spread both vegetatively and by seed. In some areas of the world, the seeds inside the nut are used for food. Water chestnut has become a problem in the eastern U.S. and Canada. Both water caltrop and water chestnut are on the Washington State quarantine list, making it illegal to buy, sell or transport these plants in this state.

DESCRIPTION: Water caltrop and water chestnut are annual freshwater aquatic plants. Both plants have triangular floating leaves that form a rosette, a foot or more in diameter. The leaf stems have inflated petioles, which keep the plant afloat. Both plants have inconspicuous white flowers and produce a distinctive hard fruit. In water caltrop, the 3 to 4 inch nuts have 2 horns and are sometimes sold as curiosities. The nut of the water chestnut has four ½ inch spiny horns. Water chestnut is a rooted plant with ropy stems that grow up to 16 feet long. It has submerged feathery leaves, as well as the waxy floating leaves. Water chestnut flowers from mid-summer until the plants are killed by the autumn frost. Mature nuts drop to the floor of the water body, and the seeds usually sprout the following spring. Seeds may remain viable for up to 12 years.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: As with all aquatic weeds, control of these plants is difficult and eradication may be unrealistic. To prevent the spread of aquatic plants, all plant material should be removed from boating and recreational equipment before moving to another water body. Water chestnut can be controlled using mechanical and chemical means. There has also been some preliminary work done on biological control agents for this plant. Hand pulling may be effective for small populations. Cutting can be used to maintain open waterways, but must be repeated throughout the season. For mechanical control, it is important to remove all plant material from the water, to prevent plant pieces from resprouting. To be effective, control work must be continued, as needed, throughout several growing seasons. There has been little research done on the control of water caltrop, but it is likely to be similar to the control for water chestnut. Contact the weed control board for recommendations.

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

Whatcom County Watershed Steward Program

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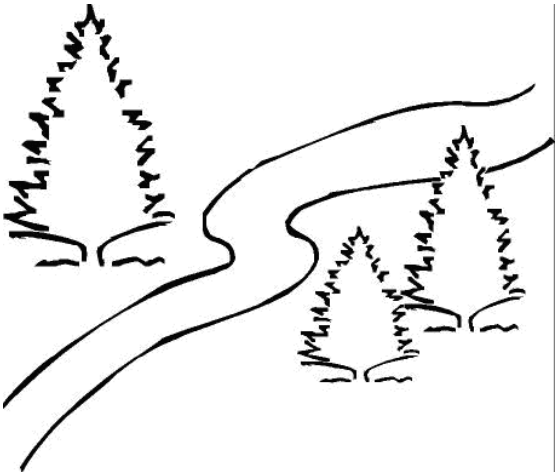
Since the beginning of the WSU Island County Beach Watcher program in 1989, over 200 people have been trained in that county. In the year 2003 alone, over 14,000 hours of volunteer work were logged by these participants in a wide variety of activities including biological and physical monitoring, educational activities, and public outreach.

The program in Whatcom County will be managed by Ken Carrasco, an extension educator with the WSU Whatcom County Extension office in Bellingham. He is a biologist with a graduate degree in Dungeness crab biology from the University of Washington and has extensive career experience in water quality, marine and freshwater biology, salmon, and land use issues. Until 2002, he was a Senior Ecologist and also an Environmental Educator with King County in Seattle. He has also worked for NOAA Fisheries, the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Kodiak and Cordova.

See the enclosed brochure or contact Ken Carrasco at ken_c@wsu.edu or by telephone at (360) 676-6736 for more information.

"Trees for Streams" - a tree give a way!

Free trees are available for planting along your streams, lakes, ponds and wetlands in Whatcom County. Western red cedar, Sitka spruce and Douglas fir have been grown by local farmers to help improve water quality in our county. Seedlings planted two years ago are now ready to be transplanted to permanent locations. With your labor to plant and care for these trees, we can make a difference in improving our fish and wildlife habitat.



When: The first three Saturdays in March

Time: Anytime between 10:00 am and 1:00 pm

Where: Trees can be picked up at BelleWood Acres, 231 Ten Mile Road, and Lynden
Halfway between Bellingham and Lynden, ¼ mile west of the Guide Meridian

Who: Anyone who lives in Whatcom county and wants to improve the habitat along their stream, lake, pond or wetland

Why: Healthy riparian areas are important to future generations of families and fish. Trees help provide a complex habitat along our waterways. They help to shade the stream to lower water temperatures and shade out reed canary grass. This is one way we can make a difference, at no cost, neighbor-to-neighbor.

How: the Meridian FFA will dig the trees Fri. afternoon. The trees will be heeled into wood chips until Sat. You come to the farm and choose the type of trees you desire and the number of trees you are able to plant that weekend. The roots must be kept wet. You are welcome to come back every Saturday to get more. We only ask that you take only what you can plant and care for. We need to find homes for approximately 6,000 trees.

Contact: Dorie Belisle at 360/398-9187 for more information and to place orders for large orders.

Plant of the Month

Continued from page 4

Coralberry is hardy to USDA Zone 3, so it will withstand any temperature dips it encounters here. Given that, and given those attractive berries, why am I presenting this plant with more caveats and disclaimers than enthusiasm? Because plants seen in arranged settings at garden shows are not always what they seem. One very attractive attribute might be highlighted—in this case, stunning berries to brighten a winter garden. But it's important to remember that shrubs in our home landscapes are with us year-round. They're permanent, long-term residents. It's wise to consider how they look in all seasons, what work they require, and how suited they are to Pacific Northwest growing conditions before we buy them, bring them home, and add them to our landscape. Suitability and good looks aren't defined by berries alone, even pink ones in the winter. And they're not always defined by what we see at garden shows, where—dare I say it—a certain amount of artifice is involved. Shows are fun to go to and they offer us good ideas; but we owe it to our gardens and the public to do our research before we accept the premise that any particular plant is truly well suited for growing here in the Pacific Northwest.

Master Gardener Office:
1000 N. Forest St., Suite 201
Bellingham, WA 98225
360/676-6736

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:

March 1	All Day	**First Day of Master Gardener Training** Extension Office
March 3	10 a.m. to noon	**Monthly Foundation Board Meeting** Extension Office
March 5	9 a.m. to Noon	**MG Open Grafting Class** Tennant Lake Interprative Center
March 10	7 to 9 p.m.	**Monthly Foundation Meeting** See article for details
Wednesdays	8 to 9 a.m.	**Master Gardener breakfasts** Babe's in Ferndale