

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

May 2005

The class of 2005 has finished its classes with 37 surviving members. They are eager to begin volunteering for our various projects, and they have some of their own to help the public. I hope you welcome them into the fold without too much hazing.

The volunteer coordinators for our usual and on-going projects are now accepting names to fill out their schedules, so in order for you to get the plum times, now is the time to contact them.

The Governor has declared 2005 to be a drought emergency, so when we make recommendations to the public we should research drought tolerant varieties, watering schedules, planting seasons, and other water-wise practices for their consideration.

See you at the plant sale!

Al McHenry

Master Gardener Plant Sale

Saturday, May 7, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Our annual fundraiser plant sale is just days away! Please check the following to see if you can provide any of the items:

Help on Thursday, May 5, at 9:00 a.m. You will need to be capable of lifting the long boards and sawhorses that we use for tables, pound fence posts, or provide the use of your truck.

Plants! Plants! And then more Plants! We can't make money selling empty shelves. Give what you can and please bring them on Friday, May 6.

Cardboard boxes—so that the customers can carry more!

Wheelbarrows or wagons—for the same reason.

Sun or Rain shelter—even if it's not an easy-up.

More gallon or larger size pots.

Friday volunteers, please arrive at Hovander or Karen's by 8:30 a.m. if possible. A snack and instructions for Saturday's jobs will be at 10:00 a.m. Lunch will be provided by 1:00 p.m. If you are volunteering on Saturday but can not come on Friday, please identify yourself to the chairperson of your area on Saturday morning.

On Saturday, please arrive by 8:00 a.m. so we can be assured of being completely set up by opening. Table Managers report to Linda Bergquist and Chris Hurst, Checkers to Jean Powell, and Cashiers to Becky Falacy. You will need to provide your own sack-lunch, or you may purchase one from the vendor. Master Gardeners will be expected to park in the overflow parking area.

Thank you for all your support! All of the Master Gardeners make the Plant Sale a fun and enjoyable experience.

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.*

Garden Miscellany

By John VanMiert



Color is usually abundant in Pacific Northwest springtime gardens. Highlights of this month will be the flowering rhododendrons and azaleas, and the ornamental trees such as, laburnum, hawthorns, mountain ash, and Pacific dogwood. The spring bulbs will soon finish their flowering. Cutting off the dead flowers is very helpful to preserve energy in the bulb for the following year, and for preventing fireblight disease on tulips.

Prune early flowering deciduous shrubs, these need this treatment soon after they have finished their blooming. A good rule is to thin out one third of the oldest canes at ground level. Then cut back one third of the remaining branches by one third of their length. This applies to forsythia, Spirea, and Weigela, as well as to the later blooming mock oranges and deutzia, and some others.

All planting of annuals, dahlias, cannas, geraniums and begonias should be finished early this month.

Conifers may need a little judicious pruning to keep them in shape. Rhododendron and azalea pruning should be confined to pinching off the old flower heads and removing some occasionally disfigured branches. Care should be taken that you only remove the dead flowers. The new flower buds for next season are on the same stems. We often get questioned why there were so many flowers last year and hardly any this season. After having asked the client some questions we often could pinpoint it to the careless removal of dead flowers including the new buds.

Pines and spruces have only one growth period in the year. It is best to prune just before the new growth so new cuts will be covered quickly. These can also be kept compact by snuffing out the candles, or pinching off the new shoots. This is especially a good remedy to keep your dwarf pines from growing too fast. Other evergreens such as juniper, hemlock and arborvitae have two growing periods and might need a second trimming later in the season to control their size.

Did you have leafminer damage inside the leaves of the holly last year? The holly leafminer always emerges in the month of May. If you are inclined to use an insecticide, to control this pesky leaf miner, the month of May is the **only time** to try to get them.

Brown Rot can be a problem especially in moist springs, particularly on the fruit and flowering form of cherry and plum trees. Fruit and flowering trees should be sprayed at bloom time (pre-pink and petal fall) with a registered fungicide for control. The infected blossoms look "blighted", almost as if they were frosted. The fungus disease infects the twigs entering through the flowers, eventually girdling and killing the branches. Cutting out the infected twigs is the first choice to control it.

The winter moth's larvae are beginning to show up now. They are known to damage the leaves on fruit trees, blueberries, raspberries, and many other ornamentals. *Bacillus thuringiensis* (*B.T.*) is about your only protection this time of the year. Tanglefoot (sticky tape) around the trunks of your trees in the fall helps reduce the population.

If we had a very mild winter season, there could be really a high slug population this coming season. Many gardeners easily miss the young baby slugs. They really can devastate many flowers and plants. Slug bait breaks down rapidly in rainy weather; place your slug bait in a container with two holes on the sides. You have the advantage of protecting the bait from being spoiled by rainwater. The slugs will find their way into the con-

tainer, I can guarantee it. When the container is full, just dispose of it in the garbage bin.

By the end of May, the lawn might need a light application of fertilizer. This should be more needed for the lawns which didn't get fertilized in the late fall. Residents living in the watershed area should be aware of the new restrictions of the use of lawn fertilizer, which contains phosphorus.

Remember the talks about the low water levels in our lakes, and the possibilities of electric power blackouts? Yes, we should be very careful to conserve water in our landscaped areas. The use of organic mulching material spread, such as a layer of leaves, bark, shavings, wood chips, sawdust, grass clippings, manure, etc., over the root zones of the plants will keep the moisture down. During periods of warm, dry, sunny weather an enormous amount of water evaporates from the soil surface.

Trees, shrubs, perennials and even annuals can all be mulched to cut down on water loss. The larger trees and shrubs if established can easily tolerate four to six inches of organic materials under them. Loose materials like bark, shavings and wood chips should be satisfactory. Items like peat moss and sawdust that have a tendency to mat down should be mixed with bark or wood chips or other coarse materials.

Even newspaper can make effective mulch, either by itself or preferably overlaid with one of the other organic materials. Newspaper alone is obviously going to look pretty ugly, but it could be covered with some bark etc. The same holds true for the use of plastic (polyethylene) layers. When watering the home garden, water slowly and deeply and less often. Frequent light irrigations tend to cause shallow rooting and shallow rooted plants are more subject to water stress than those that are more deeply rooted.

President's Message

Linda Bergquist,
MGF President **EVERYONE PARTICIPATES**

The Plant Sale is this month. All of us have been digging and potting with great enthusiasm (we've had lots of fun, too). While participating in some group digging and potting efforts I learned about many different methods of getting quality plants for our Sale. I was amazed at the dedication Master Gardeners have to providing plants.

When the Ferndale Senior Center decided to change the landscape design at their entrance, Mary Fenton, a long time Master Gardener who took care of that garden, made sure those plants went to our Plant Sale. They were quality plants; she had won numerous Whatcom in Bloom Awards for that garden. Kadee Wilson helped dig and pot these plants as part of her donation.

Mary Etta Foster's neighbor, Mr. Browne, knew Mary was a Master Gardener and asked if she would come and take what she felt was saleable from his wife's garden. Mary and Jean Powell spent several days at Mrs. Browne's garden.

Sharon Lindsay, Kadee Wilson, and Kathy Ploeger made sure donations came from their gardens, even though they are not on the "active member" list at this time. Kathy Mitchell is hard at work establishing a new garden, but she helped Donna Oehler dig, pot, and then transport some of Donna's treasures to our greenhouse. Members of our 2005 class have also donated many wonderful plants.

Teri Booth has been in charge of plant procurement for our Sale and has been one busy lady! When someone like Faye Agner called with plants to dig, but had just broken her arm, Teri was there to the rescue.

Because our Plant Sale has become so well attended we need every quality plant that our membership can donate. Teri Booth and Diane Rapoza want to form two committees for next year. One group would selectively dig plants when requested by members who are ill or unable to physically do the work and the other would pot these plants and make them ready for the Sale. Next year we hope to reach every Master Gardener in Whatcom County!

With so much dedication, hard work, and generosity on the part of our Master Gardeners, I expect this year's Plant Sale to be another huge success.

Next Meeting:

On Thursday, May 12, our speaker will be Jeanne Hager, owner of Bear Creek Nursery, on Samish Way in south Bellingham. No, this is not a repeat of the February meeting. Jeanne had to cancel due to illness, so she and Terry Maczuga from Cloud Mountain switched meeting dates.

Jeanne is involved in all aspects of the nursery business including the landscape designs. If you are looking for the newest, or the unusual, plant you will find it at Bear Creek! She was also in charge of the Horticulture Society garden tours for a number years. Jeanne's topic will be PLANTING FOR YEAR-ROUND COLOR. She will also bring along her ideas on foiling those browsing deer.

Greenhouse Committee

We are looking for donations of wood or lumber. If anyone has wood lying around from an old building or fence they'd like to get rid of, the greenhouse committee could put it to good use. We would like to build additional cold frame boxes. Minimum size of wood pieces need to be 2" x 8" x 8 feet long. Please contact Jean 360/384-8023.

Advanced Training Notice:

Whatcom County's Master Gardener Advanced Training will be held Friday, September 30, 2005. Watch for more information in future newsletters and *don't forget to save the date on your calendar!*

Plant of the Month By Cheryll Greenwood Kinsley

“Little Yellow Daisies”

Family: Asteraceae/
Compositae (Daisy
family)

Genus: *Anthemis*

Species: *tinctoria*

As Master Gardeners, we often play “Name That Plant.” We’re asked by the public how to grow and care for that “tall tree with the pink blossoms” or the “bushy shrub that comes up to my knees and has lots of pretty purple thingies” or those “short plants that grow in the shade and have teensy white flowers.” We’re always ready to say, “Please bring in a sample, sealed in a plastic bag,” because we learn in our training that identifying a plant properly, according to its botanical name, is key to its care and to effective and sensible pest management.



We’re asked often about “little yellow daisies.” This isn’t really surprising, because the Asteraceae family (often called Compositae) is the largest in the plant kingdom. There are more than 1,100 genera and 21,000 species and they’re found all over the world. Just about everyone knows what a daisy looks like and uses that name to describe different plants. On a stroll through any of our neighborhoods, without batting an eye, we could probably spot fifteen or so genera, as many species, and even more varieties.

One plant we’re likely to see blooming in summer is *Anthemis tinctoria*. We might know it by its common name, golden Marguerite. *A. tinctoria* is an herbaceous perennial tagged by Linnaeus so its botanical name has been with us for quite a long time. The species is native to the Mediterranean region and like most plants originating there, it’s tough. Golden Marguerite tolerates poor soil

and drought—in fact it prefers very dry summers—and isn’t bothered by many pests or diseases. It’s hardy in our climate, so if it dies in the winter it’s most likely due to poor drainage rather than low temperatures. No *Anthemis* will tolerate wet feet.

The look of the *A. tinctoria* species is thought by some to be coarse and untamed. They consider the yellow to be a tad on the garish side, although few quibble with the foliage. It’s tidy and a pretty gray-green with slightly fuzzy, white undersides. The leaves are finely cut and feathery, with those “little yellow daisies” rising 12 to 18 inches on single stems that have a tendency to flop over in a very casual way. If your garden is formal, this may not be the plant for you. One tip, if you do choose the species: being too generous with water and fertilizer actually encourages the flopping. The plant simply outgrows its ability to support itself. Hold off on all that care, give yourself the gift of time, and leave it to your golden Marguerite to keep itself neat. Help it along by cutting it back severely in mid-summer and late fall, and dividing it every three years or so when its center dies out.

That “garish” yellow flower color found in the species has been used for centuries as a dye. Other than that, *A. tinctoria* doesn’t have many culinary uses or medicinal attributes, even though another of its common names is golden chamomile. Because it is so tough, however, and its flowers so perky, the plant breeders have done wonders with it. They’ve developed cultivars, named varieties of *A. tinctoria* that suit home gardeners in our area who are looking for attractive, drought-tolerant plants that will thrive through hot summers and flower almost continuously. Generally, the varieties are more compact (though sometimes taller than the species) and the flower color is toned down considerably. Take a look at *A. tinctoria* ‘E.C. Buxton’, ‘Susanna Mitchell’, or ‘Sauce Hollandaise’ and you’ll see what I mean.

Anthemis tinctoria tolerates soil that tends to the alkaline, so it’s a perfect choice for parking strips or other hard-to-water places in full sun that we all tend to neglect but want to keep good-looking without too much effort. Close up or from a distance, chances are good that a named variety of these “little yellow daisies” will brighten your garden for most of the summer and well into fall.

Weed of the Month By Laurel Shiner

Clary Sage

Salvia sclarea

THREAT: Clary sage, a native to Eurasia, has been introduced to North America as a garden ornamental and medicinal plant. An essential oil, used in perfumes and flavoring, is derived from the inflorescence.

Clary sage invades meadows, rangelands and other disturbed areas and spreads by seed. Clary sage is on the Washington State quarantine list, making it illegal to buy, sell or transport clary sage plants or seeds in this state. It is also a Class A noxious weed, making it the responsibility of landowners to eradicate any plants from their properties.



DESCRIPTION: Clary sage is an erect biennial (sometimes perennial), strong-smelling herb in the mint family. During its first year, a rosette of basal leaves form from a taproot. The flowering stalks, which grow 2 to 6 feet tall, are produced in the second year. The plant has many branching square stems, and is covered with gland-tipped hairs. The large leaves are triangular to ovate, with teeth on the margins. The flowers can be white, pink, blue or purple, and are arranged in whorls around the stem. Each cluster of flowers has a large white to pale green bract below the cluster. Clary sage flowers from late spring to mid-summer.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Clary sage can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. For small infestations, hand digging is effective, as long as most of the taproot is removed. 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

Tell all Your Friends and Neighbors

The Master Gardener Foundation of Whatcom County is initiating a new community service program.

Lecture/Workshop Series-2005

Growing Your Own Vegetables!
 Saturday, May 21, 9:00 a.m. to noon
 Tennant Lake Education Center - Ferndale
 Fee-\$ 5 payable at the door

David Simonson- State Master Gardener of the Year, 2003, will guide you through the steps needed to produce a vegetable garden. He will discuss planning and preparing your garden site, seed and plant selection and dealing with pests and other problems involved in growing your own vegetables. The session will conclude with a visit to the Master Gardeners' Demonstration Garden at Hovander Park in Ferndale where gardening techniques will be observed and discussed.

Hovander Happenings

~David Simonson
 Demo Garden, 2005, is now underway! With just a few Wednesday workdays completed, we are making amazing progress.

We've had good turnouts of Class of '05 members as well as veterans. We are looking forward to a great year with the variety of projects Master Gardeners maintain at Hovander Park. An important event occurred April 13—the ceremonial planting of fava beans!

Hovander workdays are from 9 a.m. till noon every Wednesday. Saturday workdays will begin the week after the plant sale.

Volunteer Opportunity Program Contacts

Bellingham Public Library
 Becky Curtis - 360/734-0656

Bellingham Farmers Market
 Saturday 9 a.m. - 2 p.m., All Summer
 Christine Morris - 360/671-3743

Northwest Washington Fair
 August 15 - 20, 9 a.m. - 9 p.m.
 Judy Boxx -360/ 398-7591

Hovander Demonstration Garden
 All summer on Wednesdays & Saturdays, 9 a.m. to noon
 David Simonson - 360/398-0462

Master Gardener Speakers Bureau & Other Public Events
 Pat Nelson -360/384-0408

Hands Off: These Plants are Really Irritating

~Jane Sherrott; from the VanDusen Master Gardener Newsletter

After working in the garden on a sunny day last summer, my arms developed dime-sized, itchy blisters that lasted a few weeks. Curious about what caused the problem. I did some reading and discovered that the culprit was the sap of common rue. *Ruta graveolens*. I was surprised to read that a number of other common plants can cause skin irritation.

The chemicals that irritate skin form part of a plant's elaborate defense system: some of these chemicals are bitter tasting to herbivores; others provide antifungal and antibacterial protection to the plants. Different chemicals in different plants cause three types of skin irritation: contact dermatitis, photo dermatitis, and allergic reactions.

Contact dermatitis

Some plants cause contact dermatitis — resulting in itching, redness, and slight blistering that can last for up to a week — when we come in contact with their plant acids: proteolytic enzymes and calcium oxalate. Cuts or punctures from these plants, or exposure in hot weather, can make the reaction worse.

Euphorbia, ivy, yucca, daffodils, arisaema, buttercups (*Ranunculaceae* family), arum, aquilegia, marsh marigold (*Caltha* spp.), Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), hellebores, daphne, and Yarrow all contain these irritants.

Photo dermatitis

Other plants contain furocoumarin chemicals (psoralens) in their sap. When combined with ultraviolet A (UVA) light, these plants may cause photodermatitis. Severe burning and blistering occurs within a few hours of exposure of skin to sap and sunlight. Skin blackening follows in one to two weeks and may last for many months, with the skin remaining hypersensitive to UV light for years. Temporary, or even permanent blindness, may result from eye contact.

The plants most commonly implicated in this condition are members of the Apiaceae (*Umbelliferae*) family: cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), and cow parsnip (*H. spondylium* syn. *H. lanatum*). Although these plants are

sometimes sold through nurseries as ornamentals, in the Pacific Northwest they often seed into gardens from the wild, and the risk of contact comes when they are weeded out.

Ruta graveolens is the most common ornamental to cause photodermatitis. Bishop's weed (*Ammi majus*), Citrus spp., gas plant (*Dictamnus albus*), common fig (*Ficus carica*), angelica (*Angelica archangelica*, *A. sylvestris*), celery, and fennel may also cause this problem.

Allergic reactions

A large range of plants can also cause allergic reactions. As is the case with all other allergens, plant allergens do not cause a skin reaction on first exposure; however, subsequent exposures cause blisters to appear within 48 hours. Poison oak and poison ivy are the most common plants that cause this reaction. Many of the 20,000 species of the Asteraceae (*Compositae*) family contain sesquiterpene lactones, which cause dry, itchy eczema. Chrysanthemums, dandelions, goldenrod, black-eyed Susans, feverfew, pine, *Ginkgo biloba*, castor bean, oleander, tulip bulbs, lilies, marigolds, pyrethrum daisies, sunflowers, and alstromeria commonly cause this reaction. Generally, these reactions are mild and last only a few weeks; in a few individuals, exposure can cause life-threatening reactions.

Avoiding irritation

It generally takes from 3 to 10 minutes for plant irritants to be absorbed through the skin; washing the contacted skin thoroughly and immediately can prevent skin irritation. Cold water or cold wet compresses will cool the burning when mild reactions occur. The safest response to severe reactions with blisters is to see a doctor, as it may be appropriate to treat the inflammation with corticosteroid creams or pills.

The Royal Horticultural Society reports that UK gardeners want information about potential skin irritants added to plant tags. The Horticultural Trades Association and Royal Horticultural Society have produced the Code of

Recommended Retail Practices for UK Nurseries, which recommends that plant labels contain information about potentially harmful qualities, including the potential for skin irritation. In April 2004, the RHS reported that "the majority" of retail nurseries were complying with this code and providing plant labels with comprehensive information.

In Canada, some nurseries are working to provide plant hazard information on their websites, in their catalogs, and on their plant tags.

Ways to take care

Plants rarely cause severe harm, and skin irritation from contact can easily be avoided by taking a few common-sense precautions:

- ◆ Wear long-sleeved shirts and gloves when pruning or weeding around these plants, and take care not to get sap on your face or in your eyes when wiping a sweaty brow.
- ◆ Consider wearing eye protection when cutting back large plants like heracleum, which can spatter sap.
- ◆ Never cut back these plants with weed eaters or other line trimmers, as they scatter plant pieces. Also be careful with these plants after they are dead or dried, since the chemicals that cause skin irritations are still active.
- ◆ Bag trimmings or pieces of these plants and throw them in the garbage. Do not compost or burn them.
- ◆ Carefully remove any clothes, shoes, and gloves that may have come into contact with these plants and wash them in hot, soapy water.
- ◆ Clean tools well that were used to cut these plants.
- ◆ Children like to play with the hollow stems of heracleum; warn them of the considerable danger.

A little care will ensure problems don't occur when dealing with these plants.

Bus Trip Going North.....

For all interested parties, we are heading to Canada on Tuesday, June 21 to tour in the Langley, British Columbia area. Our first stop will be a guided tour of the Kwantlen College hydroponics green house. It is a learning/teaching facility so our guides should be very knowledgeable.

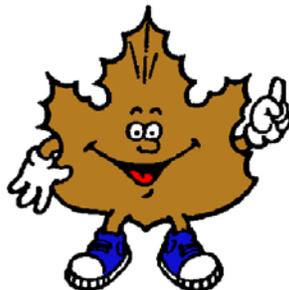
The second stop is at Lambert Vriejmodt's "Free Spirit Nursery", a nursery in the European style. We will have a guided tour of both his private wooded garden and his wonderful nursery, which are both awesome and a treasure! I've been told that Lambert is a plant expert.

The third and last stop will be Gwen Odermatt's "Petals and Butterflies Nursery", a farm based nursery with a very impressive home garden. Gwen gardens the acreage by herself, propagating and selling unusual plants on a small scale. Gwen has given lectures on butterfly and pond gardening.

Both of these last two home garden/nurseries come highly recommended by Canadian Master Gardeners. They will also arrange for an agricultural plant inspector so we may purchase plants!

We will leave from Ferndale Park and Ride at 8:00 a.m. and return around 5:00 p.m. You will need to bring your lunch and drink. Cost is \$18.00 for master gardeners in good standing, and \$25.00 for guests. To reserve your seat please mail a check to Chris Hurst. For more information phone 360/366-5501.

Mini-Compost Classes



June: Saturday 11, 18, 25 9:00 a.m.
July: Tuesday 12, 19, 26 5:00 p.m.

COMPOST! Because a rind is a terrible thing to waste...

Learn to compost in your backyard!

***Leaves *Prunings *Non-Invasive Weeds *Small Branches *Grass *More!**

Where: Hovander Homestead Park, Ferndale
Compost Demonstration Site

Cost: Free!

Who: Anyone who wants to compost at home.
All experience levels welcome

How: To sign up, call WSU Whatcom County Extension Service
Phone number: 360/676-6736 or e-mail joycej@wsu.edu
<http://whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/compost/>

3rd Annual Backyard Habitat Tour & Flora Fair

Bellingham, WA- Want to see more wildlife and native habitat in your backyard? Have fun learning how to create wildlife habitat in the middle of Bellingham at the 3rd Annual Backyard Habitat Tour & Flora Fair. Cruise the booths at the Village Green, visit private homes to see wildlife friendly gardens, and purchase native plants to kick start your plan. Visit knowledgeable Native Plant Society members and Backyard Habitat Mentors at the Fairhaven Village Green. Pick up a map and visit four private homes with examples of habitat enhancements. Purchase plants at the Plant Sale and learn about bird feeding.

Sponsored by Bellingham Parks & Recreation Backyard Habitat Program and Koma Kulshan Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society.

DATE: Saturday, May 14
TIME: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
LOCATION: Fairhaven Village Green
COST: FREE!



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:

- May 5 10 a.m. to noon **Monthly Foundation Board Meeting**
Extension Office

- May 6 All Day **Master Gardener Plant Sale Set-up**
Hovander Homestead Park

- May 7 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. **Master Gardener Plant Sale**
Hovander Homestead Park

- May 12 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

- Wed & Sat. 9 a.m. to noon **Hovander Work Parties**

- Saturdays 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. **Bellingham Farmers Market Booth**