

Weeder's Digest

All the dirt that's fit to print



Newsletter of the Whatcom County Master Gardeners

September 2005

The Fair is over! It turned out to be a very busy, successful time for us. Lots of people stopped and took our quizzes, and many more asked gardening questions we were able to help with. We need to thank all the Master Gardeners who helped at the fair: Donna, Jill, Jack, Judy, all the volunteers, and the office staff.

Our annual Advanced Training is here! The date is September 30 and the place is Fox Hall at the Hampton Inn. The brochure and application are available and give you all the information you need to come and participate. Download it from our website: <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/mastergardener/>. **The committee has put together a very instructive and fun day, so I hope you all can come. See you there.**

October is the month to vote on next year's Foundation Officers. If you are willing to serve as an officer and have not been contacted, please get on the ballot by getting in touch with our president or the nominating committee. We will send out the ballots by mail, so please participate by selecting your favorite candidate and mailing the ballot back to us.

Please Remember that our annual Potluck/ Graduation will be November 10th. So make plans to join us there.

Al McHenry,
Program Coordinator

WSU Watershed Master / Beach Watcher Program for Whatcom County

Program begins Tuesday, September 13, 2005; Tuesday, September 6 is the deadline for applications.

The WSU Whatcom Extension is recruiting participants for their second Watershed Stewardship class which will be held this fall. The training, which will start September 13, will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays for eight weeks. A wide range of experts and professionals will speak to the class about issues affecting our county from the mountains to the marine waters, and field trips will expand on the talks. Examples of the subjects to be covered in the training include aquatic natural resources including our rivers, lakes, and streams; freshwater and marine water quality; salmon biology and fish issues; marine biology; population growth and development issues; and industries such as agriculture and forestry. The training will be objective and recognize both environmental and economic sustainability.

The program is modeled on WSU's Master Gardener Program and is an expansion of the WSU Island County Beach Watcher program which is also expanding into the other six northern coastal counties. Participants receive 100 hours of university-level training and agree to contribute 100 hours of volunteer service back to the community. The training is free, although a \$40 materials fee will be collected to cover photocopying expenses.

Subsequent volunteer activities after the training will largely depend upon the particular student's interests, but may include activities in monitoring water quality, plants, and animals; informal education; stewardship program leadership; publishing; organizing; and many other opportunities.. The 13 graduates from the spring training are now hard at work with water quality monitoring activities near their homes, developing flyers for people in their neighborhoods; assessing the effectiveness of stormwater ponds in their neighborhoods; and much, much more.

Applications will be accepted until 4 p.m. on Tuesday, September 6 with applicant interviews to be held the following week.

Contact: Cheryl Lovato Niles 360/676-6736, clniles@wsu.edu, or look online at <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/enviro/water/bw.htm> for information and an application.

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

September gives the first hint of change to the glow of autumn. It is also the month when spring-flowering bulbs catalogs appear on your doorstep. Daffodils, tulips, crocus, hyacinth, lilies and what have you. Order early and get a discount or free bulbs. The selection is great and tempting.

The key to success with bulbs is planting at the proper time. As a general rule, aim to plant about six weeks before the first ground-freezing frost in your area. The "sweet spot" is when nighttime temperature is in the 40 to 50 degree Fahrenheit range. Planting then will allow your bulbs enough time to put down roots and establish themselves. However, bear in mind that planting too early may encourage rot, fungus or disease. The first bulbs to plant, regardless of your zone, are daffodils, hyacinths, and camassia. Next come tulips, crocus, snowdrops, and iris. Last are paper white, narcissus and amaryllis. If you miss the optimal planting time, don't wait until next spring. Plant them anyway, even if it is January, or force them indoors. Or try planting them in pots and refrigerate them until spring.

There are many reasons for planting bulbs, among which is they seem to foil deer to some degree and moles and voles avoid them as they are poisons. I hope you took stock this spring or summer to note where you need color and also need to replace bulbs. Nothing brings spring on like the appearance of crocus poking up their cheerful, colorful heads. Selecting healthy, good bulbs is very important. Larger bulb size results usually in larger flowers, too. Planting beds should have good draining soil, best in full sunlight. Work the soil to a depth of 12 inches,

and add organic fertilizer, such as bone meal. Other fertilizers, with a ratio of 5-10-5, can also be used. Use about a cup of fertilizer for 6 bulbs. Planting depth for the bulbs are: tulips 6"; crocuses 2"; daffodils 7"; irises 3"; hyacinths 4". After planting, the soil should be soaked down to dissolve the fertilizer, and to settle the soil around the bulbs, and to remove air pockets.

If you want to plant your daffodils once and then forget about them for a few years, opt for naturalizing bulbs. Specialists call daffodils that come back every year, especially ones in natural settings, "perennialized." They can live to incredible ages. They're the ones you want for rivers of blooms or meadows full of daffodils.

If you plan to create a naturalized area in your lawn, make sure it's a site you can leave unmowed for at least six weeks in the spring. The bulbs need to store up as much food as they can to make it to the next year.

Some favorites for perennial plantings are Birma, February Gold, Foresight, Ice Follies, Ceylon, Accent, Jetfire, and Actaea. A mixture of these bulbs will give you a range of color and blooming times.

September is the time when you are enjoying the fruits of your garden. Tomatoes, peppers, some green beans, corn, carrots, cabbage, kohlrabi and even potatoes are ready to take to the table. Nothing tastes quite as good as something fresh from your own garden.

If you went to the trouble to keep your poinsettias alive all summer, now is the time to give it the dark treatment to encourage it to flower again. Keep your poinsettia in total darkness for fourteen (14) hours every night from now until buds set, usually within ten (10) weeks. Don't forget to bring it back out into a brightly lighted spot every morning to keep it growing and healthy. Remember that if your poinsettia is exposed to any light during the darkness period, flowering will be delayed for as long as a year. You may well be advised to put a big sign on the closet door that reads, "Don't you DARE open this door!!!"

Caffeine is good for your garden. Some of the coffee houses give away their spent coffee grounds on a first-come first-served basis for use in gardens and composting bins. One of the best

uses for said grounds is in your compost bin. They are a good source of nitrogen, and combined with leaves and straw, they will get your compost pile cooking. The grounds can also be applied as a light top-dressing to acid-loving plants such as rhododendrons, azaleas, blueberries and hydrangeas. Do not exceed once per month applications. Caffeine is harmful to dogs, so forgo using the grounds in the garden if you have a puppy that might like to get a little buzz.

Early in the month, set out seedlings of arugula, kale, cabbage, purple-sprouting broccoli, kohlrabi and cauliflower. You can direct sow seed lettuce, radishes, spinach, and mustard greens for fall and winter harvest by using a row cover of some kind. Garlic, shallots, and some onions and potatoes for spring and summer harvest can also be planted.

September is also the time to dig and divide perennials such as cornflowers, garden phlox and foxgloves. Transplant them now so their roots will become established before winter. Label plants so you'll know what you're growing

September is a good time for lawn renovation. This is usually done in the spring, but recovery is almost as good this month, because fall rains and moderate temperatures hasten the establishment of new roots. Plant only recommended species and cultivars for Western Washington, which will go a long way toward preventing problems. Perennial turf type Rye grass and fine Fescue will perform satisfactorily in our climate.

It is not too late to take summer cuttings of your favorite shrubs. You should use partially ripened wood, although only a smaller percentage may take, and the ones which do will probably have to be left in a protected location during the late fall and winter. Roots may not develop before next spring. Cuttings may be classified according to the plant parts— as roots, tubers, rhizomes, stems or leaves— or according to the stage of development of the parts— as dormant, ripe or hardwood cuttings, or active that is green, immature or softwood cuttings.

The time is here for the fall webworms. Many ornamental trees and shrubs with soft foliage are preferred by the fall-webworms. Full-grown caterpillars

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President's Message

Linda Bergquist,
MGF President

THE BEAT GOES ON!

In recent months I have mentioned many of the ways that Whatcom County Master Gardeners are accomplishing our mission of helping and educating our community. Here is a sampling of more activities where Master Gardeners have performed valuable services.

Members of the class of 2005, Azizi Tookas, Lisa Burns, and Peg Nathon have all spoken to the Garden Group of the Bellingham Newcomers Club. Pat Nelson is looking for someone to speak to this Garden Group on rock planting in October and on house plants in November.

Jill Cotton will speak to the Sudden Valley Garden Club this month on *Putting your Garden to Bed for the Winter*.

Chris Hurst, Sandy Keathley, Mary Pat McLane, Pat Nelson, and I helped at the garden tour for Sustainable Connections. Karen Gilliam opened her garden for the tour.

Bill Baldwin, Lee Baron, and Mary Spencer answered questions at the Bellingham Senior Center Plant Sale.

The Weed Garden at Hovander Park is looking fantastic, thanks to the guidance of Dick Steele and all the hard work from the Hovander Gang.

During the Northwest Washington Fair, many Master Gardeners answered questions at our booth. David Simonson, Karen Gilliam, Judy Boxx, and Craig MacConnell were judges for 4-H and other horticultural events.

The Master Gardener office clinic answered an unbelievable number of questions called in by Whatcom County residents. Thanks to those of you who manned the phones. We even discovered that the Viburnum Leaf Beetle has made itself known in Whatcom County! The calendar for the fall and winter shows that we still need volunteers to help out in the office. If you who want to learn a great deal and get your hours in for the year, please email Jill Cotton and sign up for office duty.



Unfortunately, I may have missed some of the recent activities done by Master Gardeners as we continue to reach out to the community. Please let me know about any such activities - I would love to hear about them!

Our Master Gardener Advanced Training is this month on Friday, September 30. **I know it will be informative and it is another way to get your required hours.**

Also, this month, we return to having a speaker at our monthly membership meeting. This month Pat Nelson will show us the beautiful gardens she and many of our fellow members saw in England this spring.

Yes, Whatcom Master Gardeners have been very busy this summer helping and educating our community and I'm sure we will continue the effort this fall. Thanks to everyone who volunteered their time and talents.

Next Meeting:



British Garden Tour — On Thursday, September 8, tour leader, Pat Nelson, and fellow travelers will share their wonderful trip through Southern England starting with Hever Castle, Sissinghurst and others, on into Wiltshire, up through the Cotswolds, seeing gardens along the way and down into London visiting Kew and Wisley Gardens, ending with the Chelsea Flower Show - a total of 14 gorgeous gardens!

Advanced Training:

Advanced Training Reminder: Registrations for the September 30th Advanced Training Seminar are due into the WSU Office by September 10. Hope to see you there!

Hovander Happenings

This year's corn maze is open and we have had quite a bit of traffic through it. As the maze is planted to an excellent sweet corn—we'll have massive amounts to send to the food bank.

All Hovander projects have just been spectacular this year. If you spend much time at the demo garden, you hear many complimentary remarks from park visitors. Our newest project, "Economic Crops of the World" has generated quite a bit of interest. Many had never seen rice or cotton growing. This is the time of the year that the dahlias are at their best. For a real treat come out to the park for a look!

October 15 is the date of "Pumpkin Day." We give pumpkins to residents of adult group homes and children who come to this event.

There are still many MG workdays left this year, so if you need hours or just want to come out to work at the park, we'll be glad to see you. We continue Wednesday and Saturday mornings through October.



'Tis the Season

Continued from previous page

are about an inch long. There are both non-chemical and chemical means of controlling fall webworms. The simplest method is to locate the fall webworm nest in the tree or shrub, cut it out and destroy it.

September is also a good time for planting or transplanting peonies and rhubarb plants. If you plant rhubarb now, you can usually start enjoying a pie by next spring. High time for dividing the Irises, if you didn't get to it in July or August.

Remember the plant sale when you are dividing your perennials.

Plant of the Month By Cheryl Greenwood Kinsley

Salsify

Family: Compositae
Genus: *Tragopogon*
Species: *porrifolius*

Warning: Latin ahead. Greek, too.

When I was a child—back in the dark ages—and visited relatives who lived in the country, two of the treats on the fall table I always looked forward to were parsnips and salsify. Both were delicious, taken right from the garden and fried up fresh. Just-picked is still the only way to deal with parsnips; the ones in the market just don't make the grade. And I've never seen salsify in the market at all.



Recently I wrote an article about good vegetables for the home gardener to grow as late-season crops, and I included salsify on the list. All parts of the plant are edible. The greens are sweet, the root is tasty and easy to cook, and as if that weren't enough, salsify's purple flowers are nice to look at. Not long after, I was doing a little investigation into invasive plants classified as "noxious" by several entities in several regions of the world. And what did I find on some of the lists? Salsify, the plant also known as goatsbeard—that's the meaning of the Greek origin of the word, *Tragopogon*. The word *porrifolius* means, having leaves like a leek. And the strappy leaves of *Tragopogon porrifolius* certainly are leek-like.

So why is *Tragopogon porrifolius*, the innocuous salsify plant, included on lists of thuggish invaders? I'm still not sure. Its cousins *T. dubius* and *T. pratensis*—neither as tasty nor as attractive as *T. porrifolius*—are widely maligned. *T. pratensis* does have a great common name—Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon—but seemingly not much else to recommend it. In the USDA plant database, *T. dubius* is marked as invasive in several states; *T. porrifolius* is not—although it does appear on individual state lists of invasive plants. The National Park Service classifies it as invasive only in South Dakota.



Perhaps there's confusion between species, although one person's *T. porrifolius* is definitely not another person's *T. dubius*. The extension services of several universities treat *T. porrifolius* as a vegetable suited to home gardens and offer growing tips. Oregon State and the University of Florida include it as a commercially viable vegetable crop and give guidelines for its production. Plants For A Future awards it a three on its five-point usefulness scale. And in 1992 a paper was presented at the International Symposium on Specialty and Exotic Vegetable Crops proposing *T. porrifolius* as a commercially viable leaf vegetable for the winter market. Nevada includes *T. porrifolius* in its list of vegetable seeds subject to the state's quality criteria, just like seeds of cabbages and carrots, that "are or may be grown in gardens or on truck farms and are or may be generally known and sold under the name of vegetable seeds."

All members of the *Tragopogon* genus are hardscrabble plants, used to finding a toehold in inhospitable places. They're noted for their seed heads—described by Phillips & Rix as spectacular, looking like "giant dandelion clocks." The commercial production guides mark the high rate of germination. And the fact that my relatives grew salsify in the place where they lived tells me it's adaptable and easy to grow. Those are characteristics shared by introduced plants with a tendency to crowd out natives. So perhaps it's true, and not merely a mix-up in nomenclature: *T. porrifolius* might in fact be invasive and unsuited for our gardens. Such a shame.

One small consolation, if you've loved salsify in the past and must have it again: there is another genus, less common, made just to order. *Scorzonera hispanica* is known as Spanish salsify, and it's almost as tasty. Alas, it's also just as adaptable. Look for it to appear on invasive plant lists in the next decade or so.

Weed of the Month By Laurel Shiner

Hoary Alyssum

Berteroa incana



Photo credit: Stephen L. Solheim, Wisconsin State Herbarium



Photo credit: Richard Bauer,

THREAT: Hoary alyssum is an introduced member of the mustard family, native to Eurasia. It grows in pastures, road shoulders, railroads, agricultural fields and other disturbed areas; and, prefers dry, sandy, or gravelly soils. Hoary alyssum is toxic to horses, causing swollen legs, laminitis and severe lameness. Consumption of large quantities can cause diarrhea, leading to dehydration, and can cause abortions in pregnant mares. Death may result, although most treated horses recover. The plant remains toxic after it is dried, and most poisonings are due to contaminated hay. Hoary alyssum spreads by seeds. This plant is considered a noxious weed in Washington State, British Columbia, Michigan and Minnesota.

DESCRIPTION: Hoary alyssum can be an annual, biennial or perennial. The tap-rooted plant emerges in early spring. It is an erect or spreading plant, growing up to three feet tall, with multiple stems arising from the base of the plant. The thin stems branch near the top of the plant, and leaves and stems are covered in whitish, star-shaped hairs. The ½ to 1½ inch, gray green leaves are alternate and lance-shaped; upper leaves clasp the stem. Hoary alyssum produces small white flowers, borne in clusters at the end of the stems, from May to September. There are four petals, however, since each petal is deeply lobed, the flowers can appear to have 8 petals. The small, oblong, flattened fruit has a short beak and is often covered with star-shaped hairs.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Hoary alyssum can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Hand-pulling is effective on small infestations; plants should be pulled before they can go to seed. 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

Throughout Whatcom County, the Noxious Weed Control Board works with all landowners, from federal and state agencies to local municipalities and private individuals, to prevent the spread of noxious weeds. Other weed program activities include educational presentations and displays, creating educational materials, site consultations for other weeds and poisonous plants, and community weed pull projects. Thanks for visiting our booth at the Northwest Washington Fair in Lynden, WA.



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.

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



Craig MacConnell
Craig MacConnell
Horticulture Agent

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

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Dates to Remember:

- September 1 10 a.m. to noon **Monthly Foundation Board Meeting**
Extension Office
- September 8 7 to 9 p.m. **Monthly Foundation Meeting**
See article for details
- September 30 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. **Annual MG Advanced Training**
Fox Hall, Hampton Inn
- October 15 9a.m. to Noon **Pumpkin Day**
Hovander Park
- November 10 6 to 9 p.m. **Annual MG Graduation Potluck**
- Wednesdays 8 to 9 a.m. **Master Gardener breakfasts**
Babe's in Ferndale
- Wed. & Sat. 9 a.m. to noon **Hovander Work Parties**
- Tuesday Evenings **Bellingham Library Clinic**