MESSAGE FROM THE
PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Hi everyone:

Since this is the August newsletter we need to talk about the FAIR. So those of you who are volunteering for the fair will receive a special mailing containing detailed instructions, duties, parking information, and most importantly – your admission ticket. You will also get a copy of our entire Fair schedule, so you will know who you will be working with, and who will relieve you. If for some reason you will have to miss your scheduled time, you must find your own replacement, AND pass your ticket on to that person. We have to account for each ticket the fair gives us, and we can’t get any more. If you have difficulty getting a replacement call Judy Boxx (360.398.7591) or Al (360.676.6736) to help you.

Some of you may be planning on entering exhibits at the fair. We have some great tips for entering and winning ribbons with your vegetables and fruit on our website, http://whatcom.wsu/ag/agriculture.htm, so check it out and good luck.

Remember that we still need volunteers at the office, at Hovander, and at our clinics, so keep on volunteering for those activities as well.

Faye Agner has had back surgery, so we hope she gets well soon!

See you at the fair!

~Al McHenry

Advanced Training Seminar Door Prizes.

Gardening Donations... We are looking for donations of new items. Do you have duplicates or a gift that you will not use? If so contact Loretta Hogg at 360.756.8449 or email her at lahrwh7@bossig.com.
**FOUNDATION NOTES**

Celebrate!

When the Hovander Park picnic area was reserved for the annual August potluck, I was reminded that the picnic area user fee is waived in recognition of the contribution that Whatcom County Master Gardeners make to the Park. It seems fitting that the event should be dedicated to those who are providing the grunt work as well as the artistry that makes the demonstration garden at Hovander an inspirational as well as an educational asset.

The Demonstration Garden has grown and diversified from its kitchen vegetable garden beginnings. The perennial plantings and herb garden anchor the House to the grounds. The pumpkin patch, complete with the corn maze, shouts out that this is a farm. The Dahlia Garden provides spark and color. The Native Plant Garden bridges the formal plantings with the park beyond. The Weed Garden never fails to amaze visitors. The Economic Garden showcases crops which fuel the international economy. Together these plantings provide an amazing, diversified agricultural primer.

It is not enough to be quietly proud of the garden, share it with others and let those who spend their Wednesdays and Saturdays there know of your appreciation. Assemble your best potluck dish, attend the picnic and take a tour of the garden. You will be newly awed.

Do as I say, not as I do.

I’m always amazed by the enthusiasm and generosity of our Master Gardener volunteers. As the Board was struggling to determine how to fill the gap left by Karri upon her departure, Pat Edwards and Loretta Hogg said they would be willing to pick up the task of keeping track of our volunteer hours. If you have been filling out the electronic time sheet or dropping off a hard copy you won’t notice any difference. Al has been printing out the submittals and filing them for processing. He will continue to do so. E-mails regarding volunteer hours should be sent directly to Al (mchenry@wsu.edu) and clearly identified in the subject line as volunteer hours.

Loretta and Pat plan on sending out a paper timesheet with the September Weeder’s Digest. This will provide an easy way for those of us who are behind in reporting a chance to catch up. If, unfortunately like me, you have not been forwarding information about your volunteer activity on a regular basis, please try to start sending in your hours at the end of each month. It will make the job easier for Loretta and Pat and probably for you.

What you report is as important as how much time you spent. When you are reviewing your activity please take that extra second to include the number of contacts with the public that correspond to each unit of work. If you don’t know exactly, please include your best estimate. The contact information is very important in demonstrating that Master Gardeners are, in fact, meeting a large demand for information regarding home gardening. The number of contacts is the yardstick by which we measure how well we are achieving our mission.

Feel free to leave messages for Loretta and Pat regarding your volunteer activity, but please be willing to wait a while for a response. Karri was in the office every day; Pat and/or Loretta will be recording hours as their schedules allow. They are planning on processing the timesheets about once a month. They deserve our patience as well as our thanks for their willingness to take on this task in addition to all they regularly do.

— Gretchen White, MGF President

**NOW IS THE THYME..........**

To take softwood cuttings of those lovely flowering evergreen and deciduous shrubs and woody perennials. A softwood cutting is one taken from this season’s growth. So, in August and September, take cuttings from healthy plants that are not under stress to ensure a better success rate. Cut just below the leaf node. Your cutting should end up to be 4” - 6” in length. Remove the lower leaves and trim the upper leaves to ½ if they are large. Dip in a rooting solution and insert in a moist potting medium such as sand, soil, peat, or a combination. Water in and tamp around the cutting to remove air and prevent drying out. You may want to cover the container with plastic to keep moisture in. Several cuttings can be placed in each container. But do not let them or their leaves touch each other. Place the container in the shade or where it won’t get too hot. Be sure to label the cuttings.

Continue to check the container for adequate moisture and pick out fallen and decayed leaves. As soon as adequate roots appear, carefully pot each into its own container. Take care as the roots at this stage are very tender. Here is a list of plants you might try to propagate from cuttings. Use them in your own garden, give to friends, or save for out plant sale next May. And good luck!

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August has arrived and with it summer in all of its glory. It looks for all the world as if it is going to be a hot one. Now is a good time to remember and use all of the water saving tips... Water deeply but not so often... Mulch your beds well. Keep the weeds pulled so that they are not using the precious water. Do a survey of your yard and plants and see where you can change your plantings to plants that are not so needy when it comes to moisture. There are many plants that fill this need that are practical and attractive. Look into native plants.

This is the time of year when many of you go on vacation. If you are one such family, here are a few hints to help you get ready to leave your yard, and come back and find it in reasonably good condition.

Mow your lawn just before you leave and water it deeply, an inch of water. Weed and mulch your flower beds. Be sure your entry ways are swept and neat. Look around and see that all things are in good order and leave a light (lights) on a timer. In general, don't advertise that you are gone.

If you are lucky enough to have a reliable friend or neighbor that you can bribe to care for the yard chores that you could not do ahead before leaving. You are not doing yourself or your neighbors any favors by leaving evidence of your absence. Stop paper delivery and leave your lawn and gardens in good condition.

Your plants will last better and take less watering by mulching around the roots to keep them cool. Mulch also helps water soak into the soil rather than run off and it slows evaporation. Mulching can take the form of organic material such as shredded leaves, which helps improve the soil as it conserves moisture. Let the size of your plant be your guide as to how deep to spread it. The larger the plant, the more mulch it can handle. You do not want to bury your low growing plants. If you do not have leaf mulch, shredded wood or bark works fine. It will not break down as fast to break down to improve the soil. Be careful about using stone or gravel mulch. It can actually get very hot and cause moisture to evaporate rather than conserving it.

Deadheading is another little chore needing through the blooming period. Once a plant blooms and its flowers are pollinated, it’ll put all of its energy into producing seeds. You’ll need to deadhead, or remove spent flowers, before they set seeds. Some times, plants rebloom after deadheading. Sometimes they don’t, but they will look better, neater. Where to snip when isn’t always clear-cut. Let aesthetics be your guide. For example: Why not just pinch off these spent coreopsis buttons? If you did, brown stubs would stick out above the leaves. Instead snip coreopsis at the base of flower stem, above a pair of leaves. Do this as soon as petals shrive.

Yarrow is confusing, also. It has buds on then stem below the main flower. But if you let them develop, only tiny flowers result while the stem becomes brown and woody. Deadhead yarrow stems all the way back to basal foliage.

Planting in the summer can be done but there are a few basic rules to follow. To grow their best in the heat of the summer, plants need to be established before it gets hot. Some of the best heat-tolerant plants have deep roots and resent transplanting, or simply don’t like being moved. Butterfly weed and California poppies are but two examples. You can buy plants, but you are often better off getting them established by planting seeds. Here’s an easy way to give them a good start with out transplanting.

Sow seeds directly in your garden by placing them and not scattering them. Even if you’re just filling in holes among perennials, prepare the soil well. Using your finger, or my favorite, chopsticks, poke holes in the soil, spacing them the recommended distance apart for the seeds (one-half the diameter of the mature plant). Place two or three seeds in each hole and cover them with soil. Later thin the seedlings, leaving the healthiest one. You may sacrifice fewer seedlings this way and also know you’ve given each plant enough room to grow.

It is time to begin your planning toward your late fall and winter garden. It is not too late to direct sow most salad greens, spinach, carrots, beets, sugar snap peas, turnips, and radishes for a late crop.

You can start broccoli, Brussels sprouts, fall and winter cabbage, cauliflower, over winter, corn salad, kohlrabi, lettuce for winter crop, mustard greens, and onion.

Check for slugs. Do your usual walk around and look under any boards, planters, if possible, and put down bait. Check for slugs about half an hour after you water and in the evening, using a flash light.

Don’t pick the first tomato! It is tempting you and you will be able to brag about having the earliest tomato. Leave the tomato until it is slightly soft, as ripened tomatoes give off a gas that will cause the rest of the tomatoes to ripen much quicker. You will be getting twice the harvest in half the time. I have a problem following this rule as my husband always gets there first.

To dry your favorite hydrangeas, cut them at the desired length when the blooms look best. Put the stem in a shot glass half-full of water (about 1 ounce). Leave them for a couple of weeks and they will dry perfectly.

Now is a good time for cutting herbs and flowers to dry. Cut them early in the morning even with dew on them if possible. Bring them in and hang them upside down in the garage or basement where they are away from the sun and direct light. Good circulation is a must to avoid mildew.
PLANT OF THE MONTH:

**BOX THORN**

BY CHERYLL GREENWOOD KINSLEY

FAMILY: SOLANACEAE (Nightshade Family)

*Lycium barbarum*

I picked up the last Heronswood catalog today—the one from 2005—to do a bit of plant research, and I was suddenly struck by how much we’ve lost. This is not an endorsement of a commercial enterprise, but a tribute to an institution whose founders respected plants in all their diversity and represented a world so far removed from mass-produced bedding plants that it seems to be in another universe. They found it not at all odd that people of a certain age would grow magnolias from seed knowing full well they were unlikely to live long enough to see the first blooms.

Another thing Heronswood represented to me was the tradition of plant explorers: naturalists traveling the world in search of unusual plants. Certainly there’s much less world left to explore now than there was three centuries ago. And those explorers had no clue about which plants would suit home gardens in the early 21st century. Nor did they care. They were too busy making sense of the natural world by observing and collecting specimens and bringing them back to Europe for study.

One specimen they picked up in north Asia during the early to mid 1700s was given its European name—*Lycium barbarum*—by Linnaeus. This medium-sized shrub was not showy enough to catch their attention with its good looks. But it grew everywhere—it was typical of the region’s vegetation—it had characteristic purple flowers—anyone who had seen a potato flower would know the plants were related—and it had striking red berries used by the local people as food and as medicine. The explorers were part-time ethnobotanists long before the term was created.

So *Lycium barbarum* traveled to Europe, where it didn’t make much of a splash. It was a rangy shrub with low-brow looks and nasty thorns, reasonably pretty but very small flowers, and sparse crops of red berries that turned out to be not as tasty as others already available. The berries had been more plentiful and more flavorful in the shrub’s native soil and—to the shrub—familiar conditions.

I’m sure you know the rest of this story. *L. barbarum* didn’t do much for people but the birds liked the berries. Fast forward to our era and you’ll find the shrub has naturalized in Britain and is listed as a noxious weed on two continents and in at least some parts of several states, including Montana and Wyoming. I don’t know who brought it to North America, but surely it was a plant collector with a penchant for the unusual. Little did he or she—yes, there were several renowned plant collectors who were female—realize at that point that many of the more than 20 species in the *Lycium* genus are native to North America.

If you want to see *L. barbarum* growing wild in our state, you’ll probably have to travel over the mountains. If you can settle for just one part of the plant—and dried out at that—you might check at your local health food store. The dried fruits of *L. barbarum* are sold as Goji berries. They’re said to be nutritious—rich in vitamin C and other antioxidants. They also have anti-coagulant properties so if you need to avoid blood thinners, choose a different treat and skip the Goji berries entirely.

If you want to try growing your own crop, you can start *Lycium barbarum* bare-root or from seed. It’s hardy here, but it may require more water year round than our climate provides. So find a spot in your yard that’s both sunny and moist, where the soil is not overly rich. Be an optimist and provide space for a sprawling shrub that can grow to 12 feet and spread half as far. There will be no pruning to do, and no pests or diseases to worry about. Do harvest the berries before the birds do. You don’t want them spreading the seed—if *L. barbarum* likes Montana, it may adapt to Whatcom County—and besides, you want to keep that vitamin C handy for you and your family through our long, gray winters.

If you had your *L. barbarum* up and growing, it would flower through August and by the end of September, you’d be seeing those berries. If I had one, it would be growing in the midst of the hedgerow that is my entire yard this month. Between the overgrown plants and its natural thorns, even the deer couldn’t get to those berries. But if I bring a potluck, you can be sure it won’t contain Goji berries. At least not this year.

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The author of our Plant of the Month feature since 1997, Cheryl is a writer and an editor and a dedicated Master Gardener in Whatcom County. Next to the people in her life, words and plants—their history, their habits, and their needs—are her favorite things. When she’s not at her keyboard, you might find her helping others learn about gardening or tending her own small plot—chasing horsetail, counting ladybugs, and looking for a spot where she can wedge in just one more Cryptomeria. You can reach her, if you’d like, by e-mail: cheryll@cgkwordsmith.com.
**Whatcom Weeds:**

**YELLOW FLOATING HEART — NYMPHOIDES PELTATA**

**BY LAUREL BALDWIN**

Heart-shaped leaves are green with purplish undersides and are wavy along the edges. The showy yellow flowers have five petals and are about an inch in diameter. The petals are arranged like spokes on a wheel and are fringed along the margins. The flowers are borne on an upright stalk, a few inches above the water, with two to five flowers on each stalk. The similar aquatic plant called spatterdock (also called yellow pond or cow lily) has yellow, ball-shaped flowers and leaves in the shape of elephant ears.

**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Like all aquatic weeds, control is difficult and eradication may be unrealistic. The best control is to prevent the introduction of any nonnative aquatic plants from water bodies. Yellow floating heart is very difficult to control through mechanical and chemical means once it has been established. Bottom barriers can be used in small areas, to prevent aquatic plant growth. If plants are harvested or cut, all plant pieces should be removed from the water. It is not known if grass carp will eat yellow floating heart.

Laurel Baldwin can be reached through the Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board. 901 W. Smith Road, Bellingham, WA 98226. Phone: 360.354.3990 http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/public-works/weeds

**THREAT:** Yellow floating heart is an aquatic plant, native to Eurasia and the Mediterranean area, which was introduced to the United States as an ornamental plant by the late 1880s. In Washington State, the main population of this plant is in the Spokane River, although two other populations were discovered in Whatcom County in 2003-04. These plants may have hitchhiked on waterlily plantings. This floatingleaved plant can form dense mats, which interfere with recreation, water movement, and native plants and animals. The mats of plants can cause a reduction in the oxygen content in the water, affecting fish. Yellow floating heart reproduces by stolons and by seed, which are dispersed by water. Large plant fragments may also produce new plants. This plant grows in still and slow moving fresh water.

**DESCRIPTION:** Yellow floating heart is an aquatic perennial. It has water-lily-like floating leaves attached to a long stem rooted in the substrate. The

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**HOVANDER UPDATE**

**BY DAVID SIMONSON**

August already! We always are amazed how quickly the gardening season goes by!

Let's have a big turnout for the Master Gardener picnic. While at the picnic check out our demonstration garden projects. Try the corn maze (if it is ready by then) and notice the signs that were added for herbs, perennials and native plants. Don't miss the dahlias which will coming into full bloom.

You might notice the nice weed identification garden sign is missing. We haven't been able to find it. It was a memorial sign for Dr. Leonard Vader who first started the weed project in 1988.

We continue Wednesday and Saturday workdays for volunteers through October. So come out and lend a hand. Saturday attendance was weak in July.

whatcom.wsu.edu/mastergardener
I have about 250 species in my family. I am mainly from the West and range from Canada to Mexico. I sometimes grow on the highest mountains and sometimes in the desert, and I also enjoy the forest glades, in the foothills and on the plains. I have some rather plain specimen and my most beautiful plants are available only through specialists. Most of my species, the one we are mentioning here, have wood stems and narrowish, pointed leaves. I have narrowly bell-shaped lipped flowers usually ¾ -11/2 inches long flowers most commonly seen in bright reds and blues. Humming birds love me.

Last Month, Washingtonis.

— Faye Agner