



The Common Sense Gardener

WSU Thurston County Master Gardener Newsletter

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February 2007

What's Happening? by Nancy Mills

Hopefully winter is turning the corner after all the cold weather we've been having recently. I know I'm actually looking forward to some rainy yet warmer days. But I know that it's far from cold or quiet on the program front. Things have heated up with the new class that started in January. In fact, the second class was held today, February 2nd! I stopped by to catch Paul for a minute and the very full class was a-buzz with activity.

Taxonomy was the subject, and there were small groups working on projects throughout the room. I've heard through the grape-vine that along with the change of class scheduling (throughout the year instead of all at once), the format of each class is also changed to include more interaction and class participation in groups, rather than mostly sitting and listening. The mentor volunteers are helping with this and it sounds and looks like the new class is responding to this format very well.

Unfortunately, because the class is so large (which is a great problem to have), there's no room for the veterans to audit the classes this year like in the past. Hopefully, in the future, this will be able to be addressed because I for one know that I could learn a lot more and use a refresher on some topics. And it looks like such fun to boot!

I also know that Paul is working on determining and scheduling CE classes for the veterans. I'm sure he'll let us know the details when the plan is more complete.

Otherwise, the gardens are anticipating opening and Spring is in the air! New to this issue is a book review. And in the next issue (April), I plan to have an article about what's hot in the clinics. Any suggestions and ideas are always welcome. Send them to nlmills@msn.com

Did you know that there's a **MASTERGARDENER MAGAZINE** that you can subscribe to? It's new for 2007! Go to the following website, www.MasterGardenerOnline.com for more information. There's an introductory price of \$10 for this year for 4 issues. Be sure to check this out!

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Next Newsletter Feature:



Please address any comments to Paul Feenan, Program Manager

What a winter! Thanks to Shanna Winters and Paula Nelson for visiting the garden on a regular basis and keeping me informed of any damage. They continued to get coffee chaff and mulch the mixed border and put down cardboard in the unfinished area to keep down weeds. One Saturday in January Curt, Paula, Shanna and her husband and I met at the garden to put lattice work up that had blown down in the Children's Garden. Curt climbed on top of the gazebo and cleaned ice off around where the sky light cover used to sit and then re-installed the cover. It had blown off during our first big wind storm, and luckily didn't break. It was freezing cold! Thanks to Shanna and her husband for bringing all the tools and materials.

We will be having our **first 2007 work day at the garden the end of February**. The date will be given out through an email as soon as it is set., and the plan is to move some of the native plants by the old entrance. Then on Saturday, March 3rd we will have our first official open day at DirtWorks and the time will be spent pruning. There is a lot of pruning that needs to be done, and I am hoping for a good size group of Master Gardeners so we can get it done during the normal working hours of 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. All Veterans and Interns are welcome!

The work schedule for Tuesday's and Saturday's has been set up to the date of the plant sale. The goal is to have the rose garden planted, the other pathways in place, the front patio leveled, plants divided from the garden, the compost area up and running, everything nicely mulched, and the compost area ready for teaching. **Our Tuesday and Saturday hours are 9:00 am – 1:00 pm**. We will begin Thursday evenings as soon as it stays light longer, and it will be announced by email.

In the meantime, the enabling garden committee continues to work on the design for the planting beds and trying to secure extra funds for this new area at DirtWorks. There will be a group that will meet the end of February to plan for the 2007 season in the Children's Garden. If you are interested in planning the program and helping work out some organizational issues, I encourage you to contact me, Karen Walters, at 456-3506 or e-mail kswalters@comcast.net. New ideas are always welcome and only make the experience for the kids better.

I look forward to this year and seeing all of you veterans again in the garden. Welcome also to the new class that has begun! We hope to see all of you in the garden now and then. Everyone's help is essential for us to accomplish our goals for the year!

DirtWorks Children's Garden Needs YOU!

Planning! Volunteers!
Contact Karen Walters at 456-3506
or kswalters@comcast.net

Master Gardeners at the Olympia Farmers Market by Bob Findlay and Sandy Atkinson

The demonstration garden at the farmers market is clearly a place of learning for market/garden visitors as well as for master gardeners. This most public of the three demonstration gardens is unfenced and therefore visited throughout the year. One of its most positive qualities is its attraction to people of all ages and gardening experience.

Master gardeners who volunteer at the garden and clinic are there during market hours of 10am-3pm Thursdays through Sundays from April through October and on only Saturdays and Sundays in November and December. They enjoy informal contact with market/garden visitors as garden volunteers are prompted to talk about the garden work underway, and to switch from gardener to clinician at every inquiry. The addition of web access to the clinic is expected to enhance the information that we can make available to market/garden visitors.

There has been a mutually beneficial relationship between the garden volunteers and the market vendors since the beginning. Vendors have donated many of the plants on display. They are able to bring their customers to the garden to see mature plant materials that are available in the market as well as refer them to master gardeners with gardening questions. Master gardeners frequently take clinic samples to the vendors for plant and plant problem identification. We expect to enhance these interactions and affect the plant choices available in the market with changes in the display gardens. A mapping, inventory, and signage program is underway this year as well as efforts to edit the displays for clarity and educational value to visitors.

Specific displays include a water-wise area, an herb garden, a sedum bed, a scented entrance, a general perennial garden, a butterfly/hummingbird garden, a Great Plant Picks display border, an Iris progression border, a trellis display line, the compost/worm bin area as well as the several entrance and shade arbors. The retention pond contains a variety of grasses and is ringed with willows, dogwoods, spring blooming cherry trees, and rosas rugosa.

The demonstration garden will continue as an informal garden in its layout and its attraction for visitors who stroll, picnic, and discuss gardening possibilities there. While there are specific demonstration areas, and efforts to contain invasive plants and 'weeds' within them, the garden enjoys a wave of western poppies and other 'visitors' throughout the season.

For any and all interested, cleanup day at OFM garden is Saturday, Feb. 17!

Closed Loop Garden Park by Tam Crocker

Time to think about the garden once again. We will begin CLP Saturday garden volunteering on **Feb. 10th; start time is around 10AM** because of the cool weather!. Bring layers of clothing, as there is usually a breeze and it can chill down quickly. We will work on the pruning that needs doing, miscellaneous weeding, and taking out the Fox Glove that has made itself at home. Always remember that we will have the pot of hot water on and you can make yourself a warm drink, and get warmed up in the trailer. Thank goodness for that wonderfully warm trailer! It has been of great service over the years.

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Blooming this time of year, are the Viburnum bodnantense 'Pink Dawn', 'Charles Lamont' and 'Deben', as well as the V. tinus 'Spring Bouquet'. Blooming also are the Hamamelis 'Jelena' and 'Diane'. The winter hazels will be in bloom by the end of February. Then the Daphne brings such a wonderful fragrance.

Looking down the road, we will spend another year in maintenance of what is currently established. The county is still in plan development, so the relocated entrance to the garden is not firm.

Great Plant Picks trial plants will include an increase of the Heuchera collection. Many of these have performed well over the winter showing their brightly colored leaves.

The compost area is getting a few subtle new touches. The great compost produced is a benefit to the garden and the public.

Completed late last year was the memory walk. It honors those who have passed away while in service to the garden, and those who have given substance to the garden.

The garden is open for your viewing pleasure any day that is not a national holiday. If you have an interest in volunteering, you are most welcome. Come any time and for as long as you can.

Plant Sale 2007! by Lynda Bauer

As the chill winds of winter blow isn't it fun to think about spring and plants reappearing in green garb? Master Gardeners and Master Composters alike are probably browsing seed catalogs, gardening magazine and dreaming about 'what will be' for this new year. You can put that info to good use by participating in planning for our sale!

How Can You Help? Volunteer for

- ⊗ Site Maintenance Lead – skills with tools and garden equipment a plus!
- ⊗ Publicity Lead – contacts are established; work from home by phone & computer!
- ⊗ Vendor / Community Groups Coordinator – contact and solicit participants

Also needed:

- ⊗ Trucks or vehicles (with drivers of course!) for transporting plants.
- ⊗ Able bodies to work on a harvesting crew that helps collect plants from private gardens.

And as always, the success of the plant sale depends on the generous donations from Master Gardeners/Master Composters. We rely on you for suitable specialty plants as well as 'tried and true' best sellers. If the winter weather thrust your Heuchera up out of the ground, remember you can divide them when you re-position them! Joyce Butlin and Judy Smith told us that you can even cut them off and replant the tops with success!

If you need help with harvesting, we can provide people to help. If you need pots of almost any size, we have them.

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This year some of the plants we will feature at the sale include Great Plant Picks, deer / fire resistant plants, and long-bloomers. If you have Great Plant Pick shrubs and dividable perennials, contact Bob Findlay.

All donations are welcome, but Evelyn Stewart and her Acquisition Team have a specific wish list too:

Dicentra (all kinds/colors)	Brunnera Jack Frost
Tiarella	Pulmonaria
Shrubs	Phormium (NZ Flax, esp. hybrids)
Corydalis	Aubretia
Flowering Vines	
Large-leaf and variegated-leaf perennials	
Hardy Geranium: Ann Bouchard and Anne Thompson (May Bloomers!)	
Heuchera: Crimson Curls, Green Spice and Stormy Seas particularly	

Do you like to grow and nurture plants at home from seed? Last year our vegetable group raised plants that sold well, and this year we'd like to add Herbs. Also If you're trying something new, or an old favorite, we'd like to hear about it. Please contact Evelyn Stewart, Judy Smith or Mary Snyder.

Upcoming Schedule:

March 13 Plant Sale Site Opens – Plant Care and Site Cleanup begin!
March 24 Project Orientation Day on site
March 27 Ready to Receive Plants for potting

Sur goal is to be as successful financially in 2007 as we were in 2006. We continue to build on last year's work and have materials ready to support anyone who can devote 2-4 hours a month before sale day.

So keep posted to hear about the Raffle, On-Site Activities for Sale Day, and More Featured Plants.

See you in the gardens soon! Please contact Lynda Bauer 455-9236 or lynda.bauer@hotmail.com with any questions or ideas you may have.

**The Plant Sale Planning Committee meets monthly.
Anyone with comments, ideas, questions, or interest in
participating is encouraged to join us.**

**Next meeting: Tuesday, Feb. 22nd, 9:30 am in the Lacey
Office.**

May 19 is Sale Day

Master Composter News by Deb Welt and Karen Walters

The Master Composters have been busy setting up the compost workshop schedule for 2007. Then later this month, they will be meeting to work on issues of composting curriculum and teaching material, compost bin sales and time sheets. There will be a 2007 class for people wanting to become Master Composters. For more information about the class and what the commitments are, contact Paul Feenan at the WSU Extension Office. His phone is 786-5445 ext. 7910 or e-mail at feenanp@co.thurston.wa.us.

Ask the Expert by Don Tapio (Selected and edited for space - [for complete articles go to the Lacey Clinic](#))

Question: We are getting conflicting information on using wood ashes in our garden. Is it okay to spread ashes in our ornamental landscape? How about the vegetable garden? Lawn area?

Answer: Since wood ash is derived from plant material, it contains most of the 13 essential nutrients required for plant growth. When wood burns, nitrogen and sulfur are lost as gases, and calcium, potassium, magnesium and trace element compounds remain. The carbonates and oxides remaining after wood burning are valuable liming agents, which raise the pH, thereby helping to neutralize acid soils. Where soils are acid and low in potassium, wood ash is beneficial to most garden plants except acid-loving plants such as blueberries, rhododendrons and azaleas. Flower beds, shrubs and even lawns will all benefit from applications of wood ash. (Lots more detail in Jan. 8th article!)

Question: Can we use ash from other sources than wood on our garden plants?

Answer: You should not use ash from burning trash, cardboard, coal or pressure treated, painted or stained wood. These substances contain trace elements harmful to many plants when applied in excessive amounts. For example, the glue in cardboard boxes and paper bags contains boron, an element toxic to plants at levels slightly higher than that required for normal plant growth. (Jan. 8th)

Question: Do you have a "recipe" for making a good general potting mix?

Answer: Thoroughly mix 1 part garden soil (not clay) 1 part washed builder's sand, perlite, or pumice, and 1 part horticultural peatmoss. For every 8 gallons of this mixture, add 1 quart steamed bonemeal and 1 pint dolomite lime. (Jan. 15th)

Question: Do we need to sterilize garden soil before using it in a potting mix?

Answer: It is normally unnecessary or even undesirable to sterilize potting soils. Garden soils contain millions of living organisms which are beneficial to the soil and only rarely contain disease organisms which are beneficial to the soil and only rarely contain disease organisms which might damage your houseplants. (More detail and other questions related to potting soils and repotting in Jan. 15th article.)

Question: After last week's arctic blast we are concerned that many of our plants may have been winter killed. We recorded temperatures as low as 16 degrees F. Is there anything we can do now to help them survive?

Answer: For beginners, don't panic at the miserable appearance of plants just after a cold spell. Drooping of leaves and leaf roll are protective reactions to cold. They reduce the amount of leaf surface exposed to cold drying winds. Leaves return to normal as temperatures warm. Leaf drop is most dramatic on fatsia (*Fatsia japonica*), where large leaves bend at the stem end of the petiole and drop flat against the stem, looking like death itself. In very cold weather, it is normal for entire leaves to roll inward on some

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rhododendrons. If leaves are not killed by extreme cold, even partially damaged ones will recover and the plant will return to normal when the weather improves.

Plants that appear to be dead may re-grow from the roots in the spring. Do not start pruning out dead wood now. Wait until new growth begins when it's easier to see the extent of the damage. Before pruning a sad-looking plant to almost nothing or pulling it out altogether, check to see if it is still alive. Scrape the bark away with a fingernail or make a shallow slant cut just under the bark with a pocket knife. Live branches are bright green or white just beneath the bark. Dead branches are brown and may be soggy.

Check the tree or shrub in several places: at the twigs, down the branches, and at the crown or soil line. If the outer twigs have died, move toward the trunk until you hit live tissue; older wood may be more hardy than younger wood. (See more information in the Jan. 22nd article)

 Question: Will the cold temperatures earlier this month mean fewer insects this summer?

 Answer: Probably not! WSU entomologists have found that during periods of unusually cold temperatures, it's usually the "good bugs" that fall victim to the frigid temperatures. Unfortunately, in most cases, they are far less hardy than those insects that feed on our favorite garden plants. In all likelihood, with decreased "biological controls" in place, we may well have more of an insect problem this year that would normally occur. (Jan. 22nd)

 Question: Every year the Colorado Blue spruce tree in our yard turns almost totally brown in May. Our neighbor said it had aphids. How do we control this insect pest?

 Answer: More than likely, your neighbor is absolutely correct in diagnosing your spruce tree problem to be aphid related. Warming winter temperatures provide nearly ideal environmental conditions for the spruce aphid to feed and multiply.

This particular insect pest always seems to get a head start on home gardeners simply because it hatches during the months of February and March when gardening activity is at a minimum. One of the best indications of aphid presence is the appearance of a shiny, sticky substance on the spruce needles. This material, which is produced by the aphids, is called honeydew. (More information in the Jan. 29th article.)

 Question: Are there any general guidelines about pollination requirements for fruit trees?

 Answer: Most fruit trees need to be pollinated. Without sufficient pollination, they may blossom abundantly, but will not bear fruit. Some general rules to follow for specific fruit varieties when planning your home orchard can be found in the Jan. 29th article.

 Question: Over the weekend our neighbor started pruning his apple trees. He was disinfecting the pruning saw and loppers between cuts in a Chlorox solution. Do we really need to disinfect pruning tools between cuts?

 Answer: According to WSU plant pathologists, there is no quick and easy answer. It depends to a great extent on whether a disease organism is present on the branch where you will be cutting. And perhaps, even more important, knowing which pathogen has infected the plant. These are some pathogens like sap transmitted viruses which have the highest potential of being transmitted on pruning tools. On the other hand, pathogens like *Phytophthora spp.* and *Armillaria spp.*, which attack roots and can kill a portion or all of a root system, are not present in the branches and it is not necessary to disinfect pruning tools. Assuming your neighbor's tree is infected with the common fungus *Anthraco*, WSU pathologists advise physically pruning out diseased branches and disinfecting pruning tools between cuts. (Jan. 29th)

The Gardener's Bookshelf by Mary Moore

This will be the first in what I hope will become a regular column. Although there are those of us who find many of the answers to gardening question on the Internet, the need for good gardening references at home has not diminished. We still need certain books that we constantly refer to over the years to help us create and maintain our passion – gardens. I have three shelves full of gardening books and you can tell which ones are truly cherished by seeing how much dirt and smudges can be found among the pages!

As a retired librarian, I have spent years reviewing all kinds of informational, recreational, and educational material for all ages. It's fun and, I hope, useful. The first book that I have chosen to recommend is entitled *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden :Planting and Pruning Techniques* by Tracy DiSabato-Aust. It is the expanded edition published in 2006 by Timber Press. It can be found in most bookstores and on Amazon right now.

Although there are many books written in the last twenty or so years about perennials, this is the one and only that focuses primarily on the maintenance and long-term care of perennials. When I first started gardening, I rather liked the idea of planting a certain plant once and have it return year after year. However, I have struggled over the years with perennials that got out of hand, were lanky and needed to be staked, bloomed once for a week or so and then just sat there looking sad, or even those that bloomed magnificently the first year and then sort of stagnated for years after that. This book is the answer to all those problems.

Did you know that silver-foliaged plants such as Artemisia or Russian Sage should not be planted in rich soil? I was appalled at what my Artemisia "Powis Castle" did in my raised bed garden. I thought it was going to take over the whole bed in one summer. I wish I had read this book before planting it there. DiSabato-Aust discusses soil requirements for all types of perennials clearly, sensibly, and factually. No florid verbiage for this author! She even includes her "secret recipe" for soil success and tells you exactly how to figure out the amount of soil amendment you will need.

The emphasis of her book is on pruning of perennials so that they look healthy and attractive for the entire growing season. She tells you when, how, and why to prune certain perennials, including pruning to prepare for Winter and pruning to prepare for Spring. The majority of the book is an A_Z encyclopedia of perennials which analyzes each perennial in terms of its pruning needs and other maintenance. She even includes 6 varieties of Artemisia! I was so relieved to read that *Brunnera macrophylla* blackens with frost so cutting back for the winter is a good idea. I didn't do that and have been convinced that I have lost my varieties of *Brunnera* to our bizarre weather. She says that *Echinacea* responds well to pruning before flowering as a means of delaying bloom, thus prolonging the numbers of fresh coneflowers for several weeks. It would never have occurred to me to do that!

All in all, this book is a goldmine of information. It would be impossible to take in all of it in one single reading – thus the need to purchase this book and keep it handy. The book even includes wonderful appendices such as a perennial garden planting and maintenance schedule giving pruning advice for each month and then lists of perennials for specific pruning and maintenance requirements. A great book – keep it next to your Western Garden Book and you should be a well-informed gardener.

Foundation President's Column by Marcia Killam-Nunn

Well it is already the beginning of February and the gardens open this month for clean up and starting of a new year.

The board is also starting again, and as the new president I want to say that I look forward to helping facilitate many new projects. We need your help to find people to do publicity, and fund raising. If any of you have knowledge in these areas and would like to help, please let me or anyone on the board know.

I encourage all of you to join the foundation, bring a friend, and keep the support for the gardens going. We meet several times a year and always have a wonderful guest speaker, a raffle, and share some snacks and good conversation. Our next meeting is **THURSDAY (new day)** March 1, 6 pm, at St. Benedict's Church, 910 Bowker St. SE Lacey. Bring either an appetizers or dessert instead of a pot luck dish. Let us know how you feel about this change!. We'll be learning about Mason and Bumble Bees, so it's a topic not to be missed.

Master Gardener Foundation Board Members

President..... Marcia Killam-Nunn
Vice President..... Nancy Mills
Secretary..... Lois Willman
Treasurer Sharon Brown
State Rep. Bill Longnecker
Member Rep. Deborah Welt

Dates to Keep In Mind

Meetings & Lectures/Classes

MASTER GARDENER FOUNDATION OF THURSTON COUNTY: Membership Meeting

THURSDAY, March 1, 6pm (Note new day!)
St. Benedict's Church, 910 Bowker Street SE, Lacey
MASON BEES AND BUMBLE BEES by Glen Buschmann, Master Composter with his wife Janet Partlow

NORTHWEST HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY (NHS):
(Wednesday Evening Lecture Series) held at the UW Center for Urban Horticulture (CUH), located at 3501 NE 41st in Seattle. Reception 6:45pm, Lecture at 7:15pm
Price: \$5 for NHS members; \$10 for non-members.
Go to www.northwesthort.org for more information

FRIDAY, March 9: "Woodland Monarchy:
Podophyllum - Paris - Arisaema" (Rescheduled from Jan)
Dave DeMers; Vancouver based horticulturist and plant explorer

Wed., March 14: "The Plant Hunter's Garden" Bobby Ward; environmental scientist and author

Wed. April 11: "Pots in the Garden" Ray Rogers; editor, award-winning horticulturist, author

NHS and THE MILLER CHARITABLE FOUNDATION:
Saturday March 24, 8:30am - 3pm
Sustainable Gardening: *The Green Approach*. Janet Marinelli (*plant conservation*), Sean Hogan (*green roofs*), Maurice Horn (*gravel gardening*) and Cameron Scott (*water catchments and recycling*).
Bastyr University Auditorium. 14500 Juanita Drive NE Kenmore, WA 98028
\$45 NHS members - \$65 Non-members Lunch included.
Information: 206-527-1794 or www.northwesthort.org

Shows & Sales

NW FLOWER & GARDEN SHOW

February 14-18. Wash. State Convention Center.
www.gardenshow.com/seattle/index/index.asp

PORTLAND HOME & GARDEN SHOW

February 21-25. Portland Expo Center
www.oloughlintradeshows.com/hgshow.php

NORTHWEST PERENNIAL ALLIANCE

Sunday, March 4, 11 am - 3 pm
Hellebore Open House and Plant Sale
at the Bellevue Botanical Garden (BBG) Visitors Center,
12001 Main St., Bellevue
www.n-p-a.org

HARDY PLANT SOCIETY OF OREGON PLANT SALE

April 14-15, 10am - 3pm
Washington County Fairplex, Hillsboro, Oregon
www.hardyplantsociety.org

MGFTC 12th ANNUAL PLANT SALE

Saturday May 19, 9am - 4pm
Held behind DirtWorks

A more inclusive list can be found at
www.theolympian.com/181/story/62598.html