

# Master Gardener MUSINGS

The Newsletter of the Jackson County Master Gardeners May/June 2006 Volume 6, Number 3

## Officers - 2006

President - Laurie Eberts-Carson - (517) 629-7225  
1st Vice President - Susan Wilkinson - 796-8364  
2nd Vice President - Betty Lorenzi - 788-6485  
Secretary - Sindy Bradley - 750-3295  
Treasurer - Susan Nabozny - 522-3185  
3250 Kalmbach Road  
Grass Lake, MI 49240  
Volunteer Coordinator - Jody Hall - 782-7967  
Editor - Kathleen Herr - 782-6673  
kathleenherr@sbcglobal.net



## SAVE YOUR POTS

Please save all plant pots and trays you can, especially the one-gallon and smaller sizes. Our stock pile for our plant sale is very low.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

Looking ahead to May, the spring plant sale will be on May 20th from 9-2 at the Dahlem Center. Instead of our regular meeting, we will set up for the sale on the 18th from 12-6, followed by our meeting from 6-8 PM. Don't forget those plant donations!

Also, on Tuesday, May 23 at 7:00 PM, we will visit Buds to Blossoms which is located at 5900 Mapledale Road. Mapledale intersects Horton Road. Buds to Blossoms is south of Horton. Barbara Thayer will give a demonstration on planting container gardens. Plants and other materials will also be available for purchase.

Our June meeting is scheduled for Saturday the 17th at 1 PM. We will be touring the beautiful gardens of Barb and R. J. Renner at 4471 Springbrook Road in Jackson. There has been a suggestion that members meet for lunch at Knight's first. Details will follow.

## GRASS LAKE DEPOT UPDATE

Hello, volunteers! It's time to plan your volunteer hours, and René Shepherd, coordinator for the Grass Lake Depot gardens, has the following information for you.

Two of our big projects this year will be to renovate the sidewalk gardens and re-plant around the gazebo. We will be dividing/replanting perennials, amending the soil and of course, keep up on the weeding of all the gardens! Volunteers can call me at home if weather appears to be a concern at 522-5928. I am very flexible with the times people can work even if it's only an hour! If you are planning to help out, it would be helpful to bring your own tools and a bucket for weeds. If Saturdays don't work out for some volunteers, I am willing to look at different dates/times for them. A. All help is appreciated, and all you have to do is call me or e-mail me at rshepherd@modempool.com and we can discuss it.

Saturday May 6th 9-1:00 PM	Tuesday May 16th 9-1:00 PM
Saturday June 3rd 9-1:00 PM	Saturday June 17th 9-1:00 PM
Saturday July 1st 9-1:00 PM	Saturday July 15th 9-1:00 PM
Saturday July 29th 9-1:00 PM	Saturday August 26th 9-1:00 PM

Dates for fall/winter clean up will be announced at a later time.

## THE MASTER GARDENER SUMMER CONFERENCE

The Master Gardener Summer Conference will be held on June 18-20 at the Kellogg Center with some classes at the Plant and Soil Science Building at Michigan State University in East Lansing. One of the featured speakers will be Pat Lanza, author of *Lasagna Gardening*, *Lasagna Gardening for Small Spaces*, and *Lasagna Gardening with Herbs*. We will enjoy three days of fun, great food, interesting and informative workshops, shopping, and garden tours. Different groups will share the details of their volunteer projects. There are sure to be some surprises!

The conference is open to all active Michigan Master Gardeners, as well as (for the first time this year) 2006 trainees who are working toward certification. You will receive a postcard in the U.S. mail in early May with instructions on how to register online only. If you do not have access to a computer or the Internet, Ralph will be able to assist you. The conference is limited to 500 on a first come, first registered basis.

## A Synopsis of the Minutes of the April Meeting

Our president, Laurie Eberts-Carson, opened our annual membership drive meeting with a welcome to new members. She then turned the meeting over to Libby Williams, director of our volunteer activities at the Dahlem Center gardens.

Libby told the 32 members present about activities and goals currently planned for the Dahlem Center during 2006. Work will be done over the season to label plants and to make the area more accessible to people in wheelchairs. A "Peter Rabbit" garden is planned for children. Another goal is to identify plants, to photograph them digitally, and to assemble a photo album of them to be used as a reference. A sign-up sheet is available for those who wish to help with the watering during the summer. On May 15, annuals will be planted.

Back indoors, Tom Hodgson gave a PowerPoint presentation about the history of the Dahlem Center and the activities and educational opportunities it has made available to the public.

The business meeting followed. Susan Nabozny gave the treasurer's report. Our checking account balance is \$4,305.05. The February gardening seminar's final profit figure is \$1,756.39.

Darold Ebersole and Kathleen Herr will be co-chairing the spring plant sale. Flyers will have to be reprinted due to the Men's Garden Club changing the date of their sale to Memorial Day weekend. Darold reminded us of the need to generously donate plants. If each member donates an average of ten plants to sell, we will have an adequate supply. He will do his usual tool sharpening during the sale. Pots are available behind the pole barn for members to pot up donated plants. On May 18, from 12-6 PM, we will set up for the plant sale. Members are encouraged to bring extra wagons, wheel barrows, carts, etc. to transport customers' plants to their cars.

Jody reported on volunteer opportunities and pointed out the sign-up sheets on the table at the front.

Betty Lorenzi gave a report about garden plans at the pediatric clinic at Northeast Elementary School and at the Special Olympics office. We voted to assist the Special Olympics with funding in the amount of \$200, as they have no money for a gardening project.

We voted to increase the Executive Committee's discretionary budget from \$50 to \$300. Anyone spending money on behalf of the Association should save their receipts and submit them to the treasurer in a timely manner for reimbursement.

At the next meeting, we will distribute a notebook for each member which will contain a copy of the bylaws as well as a current membership list.

### EVENT CANCELLATIONS AND REIMBURSEMENTS

Anyone who pays for a Master Gardener event and who cannot attend must notify an executive committee member at least one week prior to the event. Once a count has been turned in, we have to pay for that number of attendees, and therefore will not be able to reimburse you. You still have the option of having someone else attend in your place, of course.

All members of any committee: Before spending your own money on supplies, plants, or any other Master Gardener-related expenses, please make sure your committee submits a budget to the executive committee.



### NATIVE PLANT SALE

If you need volunteer hours, consider assisting Sharon Parker at the Conservation District's native plant sale on May 19 from 10-6 at 211 W. Ganson St. in the parking lot. You may call Sharon at 782-7404 .

For other volunteer opportunities, contact Jody Hall at 782-7967. We currently have projects at the Dahlem Center, the Grass Lake depot, and at the Tompkins Center, where 300 trees need to be planted. In the future, we will also be doing gardening projects for the Special Olympics, a pediatric clinic, and possibly at the Kit Young Center.

## WHAT TO DO IN MAY AND JUNE

**TREES AND SHRUBS** - It's not too late to fertilize your trees and shrubs, using either an "acid lovers" or all purpose formula (10-10-10), depending on the plant. (Read labels!) Be sure to water the fertilizer in thoroughly after it is applied. Early flowering deciduous shrubs should be pruned back when they have finished blooming. Cut back a third of the oldest canes to ground level, then cut back one third of the remaining branches by one third of their height. Deadhead broad-leaved evergreens so that the plants' energy can go to foliage growth and next year's flowers rather than seeds, being careful not to damage next year's buds, which may be hidden just below the pod. Work aluminum sulfate into the soil around hydrangeas for blue flowers if you have alkaline soil. Remove any sucker growths from grafted plants as soon as they appear. Keep a vigilant eye on the roses and spray them regularly for pests, and diseases. Conifers can be kept to a compact size by pinching off the new growth 'candles.' Lilacs should be pruned lightly after they finish blooming, removing sucker growths and dead blooms. Feed lilacs with a good all purpose 10-10-10 fertilizer after they finish blooming.

**PERENNIALS, ANNUALS, AND BULBS** - Summer flowering bulbs can be planted after the danger of frost is gone. Glads may be planted at two-week intervals until the first of July to provide beauty until the first frost. Most new perennials may be set into the garden any time in May. Break off wilting tulip and daffodil heads but continue to feed and care for the plants until the foliage has died back naturally. Daffodils may be divided every third year when they have finished blooming, but treat them as growing plants and use care to protect the foliage and roots. Water thoroughly after transplanting. It is best not to dig or move other spring flowering bulbs until their foliage has died back. Most annuals should be ready to plant by mid month unless it is unusually cold. Sidedress perennials with an all-purpose fertilizer. Avoid spilling it on the plant, and use care not to damage the shallow roots when you cultivate it into the soil. Set stakes next to your taller plants early in the season, to support and "train" them. Deadhead regularly unless your intent is to harvest a plant's seeds. It consumes plants' energy to produce seeds, and in many species of plants (*especially annuals*), removing spent flowers will promote further blooms. Pinch back any plants that might be getting leggy. Pinch your chrysanthemums to encourage bushiness and more blossoms. Pinch them again, every 6 inches or so, as they grow. Divide spring flowering perennials. Once the soil has warmed, you may sow seeds for perennials directly into the garden. Make sure climbing roses are securely tied into position. Prune after blooming. Sow seeds for flowering kale and flowering cabbage during June for colorful plants in the fall. As the weather warms, your container plants may need daily watering especially if pots are in the sun.

**FRUITS AND VEGETABLES** - Wait until mid to late May before planting the warmer weather crops like tomatoes, melons, squash, cucumber, pumpkins, and peppers. Strawberries usually begin to bear in early June. Watch for birds and squirrels, who may enjoy them very much. Netting may help - or just trap truly determined pests. Newly planted strawberries should be disbudded until well established. Shake corn stalks to encourage pollination. Feed tomato plants once fruits set. Protect your fruit from the birds with netting if necessary. After the "June drop," thin remaining fruits to produce larger, better fruit. Peach trees need 50 to 75 leaves per fruit to manufacture food for both fruit production and tree maintenance. Apple trees need 30 to 40 leaves per fruit. Thin your vegetable seedlings to provide ample room for growth. Mound the soil up around your potato plants. It does no harm to the plant if the soil covers the stem. Tubers near the surface which are exposed to sunlight will turn green, and any green parts are mildly poisonous. As early potatoes begin to die back, reduce watering. Allow one or two runners to develop from the most productive strawberry plants. Plant seeds of broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, and other cool growers for fall crops.

**LAWN** - May is a good month to repair your lawn. Fill in the bare spots by slightly loosening the surface of the soil. Sow a good quality lawn seed over the area evenly. Water and then keep the patch moist by covering with a light mulch of lawn clippings. This is the time to eliminate lawn weeds by hand pulling, or the application of a 'weed and feed' fertilizer. Setting your mower for a higher cut during the spring months will help the grass to grow in fuller and help choke out the weeds. Fertilize the lawn this month. Use a complete lawn fertilizer with a 3-1-2 ratio of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. If your lawn suddenly looks yellow or dies out *in patches*, the cause is probably due to an insect or disease problem or to dog damage. If the weather becomes hot and dry, raise the cutting height of the mower.

**HOUSEPLANTS** - Repot rootbound plants as needed. As the growth rate of your house plants increases with the season, provide some additional fertilizer, remembering that *overuse* of fertilizers can cause root and foliage burn, or even the death of the plant. House plants can be moved outside to a shady, protected spot, preferably off the ground out of the reach of slugs.

**ODDS AND ENDS** - Slugs and snails are out in full force right now. Be sure to take steps to control them now, before they have a chance to reproduce. Work to eliminate weeds (roots and all), before they go to seed. Keep the compost pile damp and turn it often. At *exactly* 12:00 noon, on June 15th, set your sundial for 12:00 to get the most accurate time reading throughout the summer. Change the water in your bird bath regularly to keep it from harboring mosquito larvae. Most of all, enjoy your garden!

## PRUNING CONIFERS

Conifers, unlike many deciduous and broad-leafed trees and shrubs, should never be pruned too drastically since most of them cannot sprout new growth from old wood. Yew and baldcypress are exceptions to this general rule and can sprout new growth even if cut back severely so long as they still have enough live needles.

Never remove more than one third of the total growth at one time, and be sure to leave some green tissue that has potential to produce new growth. Never remove all of the green portion of conifers like juniper and arborvitae by shearing them. Removal of much of the green growth can result in a permanently misshapen plant or even the death of the plant. Control the size of sprawling conifers by pruning the longest branches back to where they meet with a shorter branch (thinning cuts).

Pines can be shaped and forced to produce denser growth by a pruning technique known as candling (a variety of heading cut). Candles are the elongated shoots produced at the beginning of each annual flush of growth. After the candles are fully grown, needles grow out of the candles. The candles can branch while they are growing if they are pruned before the needles begin to emerge. Break off about two-thirds of the candle with your fingers. Don't use pruners since you are likely to damage remaining needles, causing them to look unsightly.

Needle-leafed evergreens fall into two basic groups: random branching and whorled branching. Each requires a different pruning technique. Evergreens with random-branching patterns (arborvitae, hemlock, juniper, and yew) should be pruned in the same manner as a flowering tree or shrub. Use heading cuts to encourage dense growth and thinning cuts made close to the trunk to maintain the tree's shape. One important difference: heading cuts will only sprout new branches if the remaining branch still has needles growing on it.

Whorled-branching evergreens (fir, spruce, and pine) are quite different. These plants have pale growth buds, called candles, that develop at the branch tips in the spring. Instead of making heading cuts, use your thumb and forefinger to pinch off the new, light-colored growths while they're still soft. This will maintain plant size and produce denser growth. You won't want to make thinning cuts to whorled-branching evergreens — they will produce a dead snag, not new growth. The only exception is spruce trees: they have side buds that will sprout if trimmed back to the previous year's growth.

Heavy pruning may cause certain conifers, especially old trees, to decline and die. Many species, like pines, do not have living buds in old branches. In such cases, if you cut a branch back to old wood with no living shoots, no new shoots will grow from the part left and the branch will die. Except in species known to have live buds in old wood, like redwood and juniper, you should prune the branch off entirely, or cut back only to living leafy branches that can be invigorated by the pruning and grow. Be sure that the branches you are cutting back to have healthy terminal buds, or they may not grow either.

Monterey pine is a good example of a conifer that tolerates heavy pruning. In Christmas tree plantations, Monterey pines are sheared at least twice a year to achieve the proper shape and size. However, the shearing is done on the ends of new branches, and not on old wood. The Japanese black pine also tolerates pruning, and they are sometimes maintained as small to medium sized specimen trees by careful yearly pruning. Do your homework before pruning evergreens!

