



MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION  
KALAMAZOO  
COUNTY

# MASTER GARDENER Communicator

March 2005

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## Spring Garden Chores ~

- \* Clean, sharpen, and oil your gardening tools
- \* Prune back perennials that may need it
- \* Rake your lawn
- \* When soil permits, till the garden
- \* Start propagating houseplants
- \* Gradually pull back winter mulch and remove debris from roses
- \* Turn your compost pile and sift decomposed material through a screen
- \* Amend your flower bed soil with compost and organic matter
- \* Start a garden journal for 2005

For a more detailed list of spring gardening chores, check the MSU Extension "Green Tips" on the web at [www.msue.msu.edu/mastergardener/MG-Green-Tips.html](http://www.msue.msu.edu/mastergardener/MG-Green-Tips.html) ("Green Tips" is also available in the Master Gardener office – for in-office use only.)

## Where did I put my Master Gardener Volunteer Name Badge

Some of our Master Gardeners have commented that they cannot find or have a broken Master Gardener Volunteer Name Badge.

These replacements are free – just call Karen at 384-8197 to have a new one made and sent to you.

We are coming into the busy Volunteering season and it is important that you wear your MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteer name badge whenever you volunteer.

Volunteer and Education Opportunities are currently being updated for the spring 2005 season. You may view these opportunities in the notebook in the Master Gardener office or visit the web at [www.msue.msu.edu/mastergardener/kalamazoo](http://www.msue.msu.edu/mastergardener/kalamazoo) Opportunities will start coming in now almost weekly, so check this sight on a regular basis if you are looking for a volunteer site. Printable Hour Reporting Forms are also available at the above web site, or you may call the office to receive forms (384-8197 or 383-8815).

## WARNING: Pruning Time for Oak Trees has Ended!

You can safely prune your oak trees until March 1st. After March 1st you risk killing your trees as a result of a disease called oak wilt.

Not only will oak wilt affect the oaks pruned after this date, on your property, but also it will devastate all oaks in the area.



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Several area communities lost all of the oaks in the summer recently as a result of someone pruning their trees in May. Several instances of oak wilt were reported in the Kalamazoo area around July a few years ago.

If hiring a professional tree trimmer, remind them not to prune your oaks after this March 1st date.

As the temperatures begin to rise, the beetle that carries this disease may feed on the open wounds left by pruning the oak trees. Oaks form root grafts with other oak trees in the area and as one tree falls victim to oak wilt, the disease is transferred from the infected tree to the tree that it is grafted to.

Tree sealants can be used to seal wounds within 3 hours of damage; however, the best measure is to prune oaks before March 1st.

There is an oak wilt bulletin (ask for Bulletin E-2764) available for purchase from the Michigan State University Extension office. This bulletin includes pictures of affected oaks and also preventative tips on pruning as well as damage sustained by lawn mowers, storms and other factors.

## FROM THE HOME OFFICE

### **New for 2005!**

Usually, I am one of the first visitors to just-opened greenhouses and nurseries in the area. Sure, I like to shop at the end of the season to get great deals on plants, but nothing can be compared to early season "eye candy."

If you are like me, you are always looking for those new introductions and unusual plant material.

The last of the seed catalogs arrived this past week and I thought I would share some great new plants for 2005.

'Tiger Eyes' cut leaf sumac is a wonderful plant with highly serrated foliage that starts in the spring as chartreuse-green and matures to yellow with rosy pink stems for the summer months. Fall color is extraordinary as it becomes scarlet orange.

Oriental in appearance, this plant does well in full sun and reaches a height and width of 6 feet. This is definitely not your ordinary sumac!

Heuchera have also been developed that rival the dramatic deep purple and variegated ones of years past. 'Key Lime Pie,' 'Peach Melba' and 'Crème Brule' are all new introductions ranging from neon yellow-green to a harmony of peaches, yellows and rose colors.

## **KALAMAZOO COUNTY: Upcoming Events**

**Super Soils Saturday** – Once again the Kalamazoo Master Gardeners will be participating in Super Soils Saturday. This event offers the public the chance to learn about the importance of testing their soil before planting as well as other important safe environmental practices information. Several locations will be involved around the county. There is a training prior to the actual event.

If you are interested in participating and earning volunteer hours, please contact me at 383-8815. You must be available for both dates to volunteer for Super Soils Saturday.

Training: April 9, 1:30-4

Event: Saturday, April 23, 9:00-1:00

Location: Kalamazoo Nature Center

Call Emelee at 383-8815 to sign up for training and volunteering at event.

Details about training and event locations will be sent to all who sign up.

## **Master Gardener Hotline –**

It's that time of year again when Master Gardeners share their horticulture knowledge by staffing the Hotline. It's important to attend a training if you have never staffed the Hotline, or if it's been awhile and you would just like a refresher. You must call the office to sign up for a training date – call Karen at 384-8197. Trainings are limited to 30 participants.

Training will be offered to all those interested in staffing the hotline.

Training dates are:

Tuesday, April 12, 7-8:30 p.m., Room 303 at MSU Extension

Tuesday, April 19, 7-8:30 p.m., Room 311 at MSU Extension

Thursday, April 21, 7-8:30 p.m., Room 311, at MSU Extension

Tuesday, April 26, 7-8:30 p.m., Room 303 at MSU Extension

The Hotline will be operational starting April 25 and you may sign up for a shift starting in April. The Hotline runs through mid-October.

As always, the office will not call to remind Master Gardeners of the dates and times they have signed up for, so get out your calendars to see what date works for you!

## “Ask a Master Gardener”

Some of our Master Gardeners with longevity may know this event as “Let’s Go Gardening”. The State office has designated Saturdays in May as “Ask a Master Gardener” when Master Gardeners volunteer at local Greenhouses and Garden Centers to assist shoppers with gardening questions.

The Kalamazoo office is extending this event to include the first Saturday in June also. Many of you have requested this over the years and, with the local weather and gardening conditions, another weekend is often needed as gardeners are still choosing plants and getting planting ideas for around their homes.

We are still working on finalizing locations for this event. This month-long event has limited volunteer positions and usually fills up fast, so watch your mail for a detailed list of facilities and times to sign up for. The office will not take advance scheduling requests prior to the mailing.

## Recognition Banquet Reminder

Watch your mail for an invitation to the Master Gardener Volunteer Recognition Banquet which will occur on May 12 at the Indian Run Golf Club & Banquet Facility. Current certified Master Gardeners will receive an invitation and will require an RSVP.

## Master Gardener Policy Questions

Questions have come up on what types of volunteer activities can be claimed as credit towards certification for the Master Gardener program. Many gray areas have occurred and I hope to help sort these questions out by offering some explanation here.

After reviewing the State MSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteer policy, and discussing these questions with other MSU Extension Master Gardener Coordinators, the following thoughts were shared to help in the determination of what volunteer hours can be accepted towards certification:

\* In what you’re doing, how are you representing or promoting MSU Extension and educating the public in “best practices” following MSU Extension researched information?

Questions that have been presented to our office – things to consider:

\* Garden Walk Hosts – Is there a question and answer booth, or time for horticulture-related questions at each stop? Do you share information with participants at the stops?

\* Helping neighbors with gardening questions – If you gather several neighbors as an informal group and

educate them on “best practices”, i.e. lawn care, pest control, fruit tree spray schedules, proper tree trimming techniques and schedule, etc., you may count this as volunteer time.

Determinations on previously asked questions that should not be counted as volunteer time:

- \* Painting fences in landscape areas
- \* Distributing or installing signs for events
- \* Working at money-raising events that are not associated with MSU Extension UNLESS you are sharing horticulture information with the public or helping with a question and answer session or booth while at the event.

## Special Memories

Every spring my grandmother would make sure to plant pansies in her garden. When they bloomed, we would go out together, sit on the grass and cut the colorful flowers. We would then take them to her kitchen, place the colorful-petaled flowers in a sink of cool water and, as grandma would say, “wash their little faces”. Each bloom was then carefully placed in a small vase or sometimes floated in a bowl of water.

Now, no matter where or when I see pansies blooming, I always see her face in the little pansy faces. What a special gift and memory to give to a child.

Do you have a special gardening story or memory to share? If you do, please submit it to the MSU Extension Master Gardener office for possible publication in the next Communicator issue.



Courtesy of: Kathryn Kawecki

## Starting Seed Indoors

Seeds started indoors usually germinate, but the resulting seedlings are sometimes weak from lack of light and perform poorly when placed in the garden. Gardeners wanting only a few plants are probably better off purchasing them from a local garden center.

Damping-off is a fungus disease common on seedlings started at home. The disease causes seedling stems to shrivel and turn brown at the soil line. Infected plants fall over. At first, only a few fallen plants are seen then more, until practically all the seedlings are dead. Damping off is more of a problem on over-watered plants growing in poorly drained soils.

Using pasteurized soil is another way gardeners avoid diseases. Fill a pan or metal tray with a 4 inch, or less, layer of moist soil. Bury a one and a half inch diameter potato in the center of the soil, then cover the pan with aluminum foil, and seal the edges. Punch a small hole in the center of the aluminum foil and insert the bulb end of a candy thermometer. Place the pan in an oven at 180 to 200 degrees. After the thermometer reads 180 degrees, leave the soil in the oven 30 minutes then remove and allow it to cool. The potato will be cooked if the soil is properly pasteurized. Pasteurizing the soil is useless if dirty containers are used. Pasteurizing soil in the oven can create an odor some people find offensive. Clean clay pots can be sterilized by baking while the soil is heated. Pots can be sterilized by soaking them in a solution of one part chlorine bleach and nine parts water. Rinse, and allow the pots to dry thoroughly before filling them with soil.

An alternative is the purchase of new, plastic or fiber, disposable trays or flats. Plants grown in peat pots suffer little setback when transplanted into the garden.

Use a loose, well-drained, fine textured soil mix that is low in nutrients. A suitable mix is equal parts of pasteurized garden soil, sand and sphagnum peat moss. Commercially prepared mixtures may also be used.

Fill the containers about two thirds full with soil. Level the soil and soak it thoroughly. Sift more soil mixture through window screening to form a layer that fills one fourth to one half of the remaining depth of the container.

Make a furrow one fourth of an inch deep in the sifted soil. Sow large seeded plants directly into the bottom of the furrow. Before sowing small seed, fill the furrow with vermiculite, then sow small seed on the surface of the vermiculite.

Sow seed in flats at the rate recommended on the seed packet. Sow two to four seeds per peat pot if the seeds are large. After planting, cover the furrows with a thin layer of vermiculite, then mist with water. A fine mist prevents washing the seed out of the soil. Some seed should not be covered. To be sure, check the cultural suggestions for each plant before sowing the seed.

Once seeds are planted, place a sheet of plastic over the containers and provide temperatures between 70 and 75 degrees. The containers need no more water until the seed germinates. Under no circumstances should plastic covered containers be placed in direct sunlight.

Once seedlings are growing, remove the plastic and provide proper growing conditions. Give the seedlings adequate light. Even the sunniest windowsill provides varying amounts of light and only from one direction. Windowsills often lack adequate humidity and are too warm for best seedling growth. Cool white fluorescent lights placed three to six inches above the seedlings are a good light source. The length of time the lights are on varies with the type of annual grown. Some general guidelines are given here, but read the seed packet for additional information. A time clock will make sure the day lengths are regular. If only one light fixture and time clock are used, the plants must have compatible growth requirements.

These plants need 10 to 12 hour days and temperatures between 60 and 65 degrees; calliopsis, china aster, cornflower, gaillardia, petunia, phlox, poppy, Rudbeckia, salpiglossis, scabiosa, snapdragon, and verbena.

Most other plants need 18 hour days. On short days they form flowers and never produce good flowering plants outdoors. These plants are grown under 18 hour days at 65 degrees; cockscomb, cosmos, dahlia, marigold, morning glory, scarlet sage, sunflower, and zinnia.

Annuals not included in the above groups are grown under 18 to 20 hour days.

After removal of the plastic, the seedlings must be watered frequently and fertilized. Water when the soil surface begins to dry and use a house plant fertilizer according to label directions.

Seedlings in flats should be transplanted to other containers at wider spacings once two true leaves have developed. Handle the seedlings very carefully as they are easily injured. Use different flats but the same sterile soil mix. Use a spacing of one and a half inches between plants.

## MSU-Kalamazoo County Master Gardener Continuing Education Quiz

This March 2005, Continuing Education Quiz is one of a series of CE quizzes presented by the *Communicator*. Each quiz, when completed and passed, will provide one hour of MSU-sponsored horticultural training credit. A passing grade is 80% correct. Please submit your quiz to: Attn: Master Gardener Program MSU Extension -Kalamazoo County, 201 W. Kalamazoo Ave., Room 302 Kalamazoo, MI 49007. All Master Gardeners may take this CE quiz for education credit. The hour is education not volunteer, so it will not count towards your basic certification.

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

- When using the term "mycorrhizae" we generally are talking about:
  - Roots
  - Fungus
  - increase in water and nutrient absorption
  - all of the above
- \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are the two main methods of preserving herbs
- True or False. Leafhoppers belong in the insect order Hymenoptera.
- True or False. A broadleaf evergreen such as a rhododendron, should be pruned in the fall.
- What is the name of the toxic chemical that is contained in Walnut tree roots that causes Tomatoes to wilt and die when they come into contact with it?
- A person is calling the hotline. They are concerned because the poinsettia that they had over the holiday

season, had small white things flying around it, especially at watering. They have since thrown the plant out, but are now noticing the same small white flying insects around other houseplants. What is the name of the insect and what should they do about it?

- When using the term Sabadilla we are referring to:
  - Fungal plant disease that favors warm and moist conditions
  - Plant name of a climbing tropical vine
  - Borer that attacks magnolia trees
  - broad-spectrum contact insecticide derived from a plant
- Hotline question: The caller is concerned about their red oak tree. Some of the leaves have a growth on them. Looking at the underside of the leaf, where the main vein comes from the petiole region, it is grotesquely enlarged and the growth is tan in color. What is this and what, if anything should be done with it?
- True or false. 'Poorman' is a variety of European Gooseberry that is recommended for Michigan.

10. Please look at this picture, right, and determine the following:

Is this a monocot or dicot plant?

Is the leaf arrangement alternate or opposite? \_\_\_\_\_

Extra credit- Please identify the plant.



Courtesy of: Kathryn Kawecki