

THE GREEN SCENE

Newsletter of the
MIDLAND COUNTY
MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION



Next meeting: Tuesday, November 14, 2006, 6:30 PM.

Location: Midland County Extension Building, Commissioners' Room, ground floor.

Speaker: Rich Dumler

Rich is a retired Dow Corning engineer who has turned his love for woodworking into a second career. Perhaps you have seen his display at the June Art Fair by the Center for the Arts. Rich has an appreciation for garden design and his archways, gazebos, pergolas and tuteurs all contribute to what he refers to as vertical landscaping. His pieces are constructed out of cedar to withstand our northern climate, and he insists on perfection. Because of that, Rich has made a name for himself in the area as a master craftsman. Please come and enjoy his power point presentation on some of the gardens to which he has added vertical beauty in our tri city area.

Business.

Hi Gardeners,

The weather is starting to turn to fall and we are starting to put the gardens to bed. I will miss all the beautiful flowers but it is time to move on.

We are starting our indoor meetings with Peggy Shaver speaking to us. It should be an interesting talk. Please invite any MG trainees you know to the meeting - they can attend three meetings before they need to decide if they want to join us.

Remember to wear your name badge so we can reacquaint ourselves after the long summer break.

See you soon

Sue Wilber, President

Midland County Master Gardener Association, Executive Committee:

Sue Wilber, President, 832-2792, e-mail: cswilber@yahoo.com

Cheryl Weeks-Rosten, Vice-President Programs, 631-5126, e-mail: jrosten@sbcglobal.net

Sherry Kalina, Vice-President Projects, 631-8467, e-mail: Kalinasf@chartermi.net

Chris Hays, Vice-President Projects, 631-5956, e-mail: BandCAntiq@aol.com

Janelle Steckley, Secretary, 687-2108, e-mail: jannykay@tds.net

Lynda Otey, Treasurer, 832-3103, e-mail: loteyda@charter.net

CHRISTMAS POTLUCK INFO

We will have a potluck Christmas party on Tuesday, December 12th, our regular meeting night, and Ann Adam has agreed to open her home to us again.

Last year we decorated a live tree with natural ornaments and gave it to Kings' Daughters. They have made it known they would very much like another one this year! So this is the time of year to rescue dried flowers, bits of birch bark, pine cones and dried weeds. If you have ribbon to contribute, that would be great too. Spray painted Allium heads and ribbon will be at Ann's. All we need is your creativity.

As a courtesy to Ann, please RSVP by December 10th to Ann Adam, 835-5158.

Cheryl

MESSAGE FROM MSU, EAST LANSING

Check out the MG Shopping Mall!!! There are NEW items available to MGVs and anyone interested in MG apparel and lots of cool stuff!

Two NEW T-SHIRTS are available at a very affordable price!! There are two GREENS to choose from: Bright LIME Green and a Dark FOREST Green; the logo is screen-printed in white on the left side of chest. It retails for \$9.95!! I know some Coordinators expressed an interest in getting these for their class participants.

ALSO NEW is the Kneeling Pad --- MSU Green, shiny vinyl. Great for kneeling in the garden or to pad the under side of us on those hard bleachers!!! This also retails for \$9.95! Makes a great gift. MGVP Logo on one side.

Check out the PHONE CLIP also on the Shopping Mall. It sticks to your cell phone and clips on your belt loop!

--Sharon Conley
Administrative Assistant

NEW LOG-IN MG VOLUNTEER HOURS

Master Gardeners, please use this new address to log-in and record your volunteer hours. Please get your hours recorded by December 31, 2006. These hours will be reviewed to recognize volunteers who have reached the key volunteer milestones of 250 hrs, 500 hrs and 1000 hrs. Awards will be presented at the March 2007 meeting.

<https://mi.mgrecord.com/login.php>

Chris Hays

EARNING THE ADVANCED MASTER GARDENER CERTIFICATE

NEW POLICY - MGVs now have 5 years to achieve ADVANCED MGV status. Previously they had only 2 years from the date they achieved Master Gardener Volunteer status. This allows a MGV who can achieve only the minimum requirements for annual recertification (15 volunteer hours & 5 education hours) to achieve Advanced MGV certification in 5 years.

SPRING CONFERENCE AT MSU, EAST LANSING

The 2007 Spring Conference, Learn to Grow Green (this replaces the Summer Conference) is going to be held on March 16 & 17. On Friday, March 16 we are hosting a welcome reception in the conservatory at the Plant & Soil Sciences Building here on campus. On Saturday (St. Patrick's Day), at the MSU Business College Complex we will have a keynote presentation beginning at 8:00am, followed by concurrent classes, then lunch. The afternoon will provide 2 more sets of concurrent classes, ending at 4:30. There will be gardening-related vendors, the Master Gardener Shopping Mall, door prizes and more. We are planning to have the **Information brochure and registration form posted on the MGVP website before Thanksgiving!** The registration website is <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/mastergardner>.

The cost for Saturday will be \$75 and MGVs will receive 7 hours of educational credit. I do not have a cost yet for Friday's reception.

Mary McLellan

PLANT NUTRIENTS

Swedish professor Tom Ericsson, researcher in plant nutrients at the Swedish agricultural college in Ultuna, has come up with a simple fertilizer formula for the plants we grow in containers and in our gardens. By analyzing plant tissue; roots, stems and leaves from a large number of plants; he was able to determine that plants contain the different nutrients in very similar amounts. All plants cells are basically very similar, sharing the same physiological properties regarding photosynthesis and respiration. Plant nutrients are the building blocks in these systems. Based on the test results, he discards the notion that specialty fertilizers are needed for certain plants, such as rhododendrons, orchids, roses, cacti or any other plant. The optimal plant fertilizer has a ratio of 10:1.5:7. (NPK), plus all the micronutrients.

Tom Ericsson also discards some of the ideas connected with certain nutrients.

- We have all learned that nitrogen stimulates growth. The truth is that all 13 nutrients will stimulate growth in plants lacking on or the other. Growth stimulation is not specific for nitrogen. Tom Ericsson believes that this misapprehension is based on the fact that in our part of the world lack of nitrogen is the limiting factor. Adding nitrogen will stimulate growth. The same effect can be achieved by adding phosphorus in Africa. Phosphorus is said to enhance root growth and flower production. Both statements are refuted by Tom Ericsson.

- In the first place, lack of phosphorus is unusual in our area. Should it occur and you add phosphorus, plants will grow better, but primarily above ground. On the contrary, root growth is prioritized when there's a lack of phosphorus, as well as when there's a lack of nitrogen.

Regarding flower production, a limited nitrogen supply will have more effect than adding phosphorus. Simpler is to just reduce the amount of balanced fertilizer applied.

Potassium is said to increase disease resistance, and improve cold hardiness. Tom Ericsson dismisses these opinions. Lack of potassium is unusual in our gardens. Magnesium and manganese are equally essential for photosynthesis, which produces the sugars that are involved in this process.

Choose a liquid, well balanced fertilizer containing all the nutrients the plants need. Add 1 ml to 1 quart of water (4ml/gallon), and use it for all your plants. It makes a weak nutrient solution that you will use year round, each time you water. (One tsp contains 5ml).

That different plants have different needs for nutrients doesn't matter using this method. It suits them all. Because the nutrients are added with the water it is a self regulating system. Fast growing plants that need more fertilizer will also need more water. When more water is supplied, so is more fertilizer.

"The method works equally well for plants with low nutrient needs", says Tom Ericsson, who himself is an enthusiastic grower of many slow growing species, such as cacti, orchids and tillandsia. They all need very little water, getting small amounts of fertilizer. Additionally, cacti and orchids are grown in fast draining substrates, and some of the water and fertilizer will drain out right away.

NEW STUDY ENLISTS COFFEE IN SLUG CONTROL

According to *Nature* magazine, we have another weapon in the eternal battle against slugs and snails: the double espresso. Slugs and snails hate caffeine, researchers have discovered. The chemical could become an environmentally acceptable pesticide.

Robert Hollingsworth of the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service in Hilo, Hawaii, and his colleagues were testing caffeine sprays against the coqui frog, an introduced species that infests potted plants. They also noticed that a 1 to 2 percent caffeine solution killed nearly all the slugs and snails within two days. Concentrations as low as 0.01 percent put the pests off their dinner. A cup of instant coffee contains about 0.05 percent caffeine, and brewed coffee has more.

Coffee grounds are already recommended as a home remedy for keeping slugs and snails at bay. Grounds repel slugs, Hollingsworth found, but a caffeine solution is much more effective, he says: "Slugs turn back immediately after contacting the [caffeinated soil]." Caffeine is more effective against slugs than metaldehyde products. The United States bans metaldehyde residues in food, but classifies caffeine as safe. It may even qualify as organic, adds Hollingsworth. "I would expect caffeine applications to kill small snails and slugs, and repel the larger ones," says Hollingsworth. He envisions it being used in greenhouses and on fruit and vegetable crops.

Britt

NEW PLANTS FOR 2007

This is the time to start making wish lists for next year's gardening season. Here are a couple of items that I found on the Internet.

Dan Heims at Terra Nova is doing a lot of work with, among other things, Heucheras and Helleborus. It's always interesting to check out the Terra Nova new plant list. The following caught my eye:

Corydalis 'Berry Exciting', yellow foliage, lavender flowers. If you're gardening in shade like me, this should brighten up things considerably. Corydalis in general are easy to grow, providing clumps of feathery foliage, good complements to sturdy hosta leaves.

Heuchera 'Cinnabar Silver'. A sturdy looking plant, good contrast effect and matching white-edged hostas

Heuchera 'Midnight Rose'. This amazing compact plant has burnished black leaves, thickly spotted hot pink in spring. Summer leaves lighten and cream and pink dots adorn the foliage. Sunny location recommended.

Monrovia introduces a diversity of new plants. A columnar purple plum, suitable for the small garden looks very interesting, and so does the Heatwave series of *Salvia greggii* cultivars from Australia, in different shades of intense pink. Salvias are great and carefree bedding plants, providing a longlasting flower show and very little deadheading, thriving in a dry and sunlit spot in the garden. Another new salvia I'd like to recommend is *Salvia* 'Mystic Spires Blue'. A cross between *S. farinacea* ('Victoria Blue') and *S. longispicata*, it looks much like a larger version of 'Victoria Blue'. The plant is about twice as tall, with rich blue almost velvety flower spikes, that kept going all season. In my partially shady location it started to flop over a little at the end of the summer, in full sun it will be sturdier.

Walters Gardens, located in west Michigan, produces a huge array of plants for the perennial nursery industry. Their new offerings for 2007 can be viewed at:

http://www.waltersgardens.com/_ccLib/downloads/06-07_New_Item_List.pdf.

Ask your local garden center to bring in the plants you find interesting. If we all asked for more plants at the local nurseries, they'd have to start bringing them in!

Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, or family status. MSU is an affirmative-action equal opportunity institution

The Perennial Plant Association has selected a catmint as perennial for the year 2007, *Nepeta* 'Walker's Low'. It reaches 3' with a spread of 2 ½- 3'. Once established it thrives in well-drained soil, is pest and disease resistant and not much liked by deer. Cut back the first flush of flowers after they start to fade, and it will rebloom until frost. This catmint is reportedly not as attractive to cats as some of its relatives can be.

BOOK REVIEW

"Landscaping with Native Plants of Michigan", Lynn M. Steiner. Voyageur Press, 2006. ISBN 978-0-7603-2538-4. \$24.95.

This book covers a lot of aspects dealing with the use of native plants in our gardens. There's a brief and very interesting history of Michigan flora, with short descriptions of each of the different types of habitats found in our state. Each major habitat description includes a list of plants belonging in that habitat, which could be used successfully in a garden setting. After a section of gardening basics, there are plant recommendations for rock gardens, shade gardens, butterfly gardens, and several other helpful lists. The plant lists include both herbaceous plants and shrubs and trees. There are also recommendations concerning plants not native to Michigan, some ideas of how to combine the native with the "exotic", mindful of the fact that there are useful plants from other parts of the world.

The second part of the book the author calls 'Native Plant Profiles'. Having narrowed down the number of plants to profile to a manageable figure, she proceeds to describe each plant in enough detail to make it a useful reference for readers not familiar with native plants. She includes growing conditions, brief cultural advice, recommended uses, companion plants, and a brief description of related species found in Michigan.

I have seen several books about gardening with wildflowers. I find this book very interesting because of its connection to local flora. Also, the information provided is very useful, and should provide anyone who is interested in growing native plants with sufficient information to make it a successful venture.

Britt

Editor: Britt Lundberg, 837-1644

E-mail address: BLundbloom@hotmail.com

Co-Editor:

Gina Pederson, 631-8503

E-mail: rhpederson@charter.net

The deadline for articles for the next newsletter is November 18, 2006.

MSU Extension Office, 832-6640
220 W Ellsworth, Midland, MI 48640