

A Bit of Dirt ♦

Volume 7 Issue 3

Autumn 1999

The Newsletter of the Gwinnett Master Gardeners



A Bit of Dirt is published quarterly. Editor is Gail Martin. If you have news, or an article you would like to have published, please call me at 770-381-2513 or email me at GailTMartin@compuserve.com



*October turned my maple's
leaves to gold;
The most are gone now;
here and there one lingers;
Soon these will slip from out
the twig's weak hold,
Like coins between a dying
miser's fingers.*

T. B. Aldrich



Future Meetings

Gwinnett Master Gardeners

September 21
October 19
November 16

Ga. Perennial Plant Assoc.

September 16
October 28
November 18

Ga. Native Plant Society

September 14

American Hydrangea Society

October 18

Fantasy in Lights

Mid-November - December
Callaway Gardens

A Message from our President

We are just returning from the 1999 International Master Gardener Conference. It was held in San Antonio, Texas. The conference was attended by 900 Master Gardeners. The day we had a sit down lunch was pretty impressive. It was like a football field full of round tables and lots of people. The food was surprisingly great.

The keynote speaker was Roger Swain, host of the Victory Garden (not a bad start). He is an informative speaker with a great sense of humor.

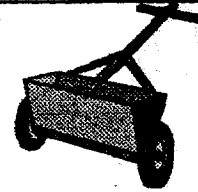
Many aspects of gardening were covered. Jim Wilson, host of the Victory Garden now heads "Grow A Row for the Hungry" program for the garden writers. This is a worthwhile program catching on all over the country.

I had never heard Felder Rushing speak, but I will never miss the opportunity again. He is the author of "Pass Along Plants". What a great speaker!

Mark Plotkin, an ethnobotanist and author of the best seller "Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice", spoke on the heavy subject of saving the Amazon rainforest. He founded the Shaman's Apprentice program in which tribal elders pass their knowledge of plants and their medicinal purposes to younger tribe members. He has lived in the Amazon for 18 years. The movie "Amazon" is shown at Imax theaters all over the

(Cont'd on Page 8)

Notes from the Extension Office



Turfgrass	pH	Mowing height	Fertilization Rates
Centipede	6.0-6.5	1-1 1/2"	Apply 5 lbs 12-4-8 per 1,000 sq ft after spring green-up and again midsummer.
Zoysia	6.0-6.5	1/2-1 1/2"	Apply 8 lbs 12-4-8 per 1,000 sq ft when green-up begins and again monthly until six weeks before avg first frost date
Bermuda	6.0-6.5	1-2" (Common) 1/2-1 1/2" Hybrid	Apply 8 lbs 12-4-8 per 1,000 sq ft when green-up begins and again monthly until six weeks before the average first frost date.
Tall Fescue	5.5-6.5	2-3"	Apply 6 lbs 16-4-8 per 1,000 sq ft in early September, November, and February
St. Augustine	6.5	2-3" Stnd. 1-2" Dwarf	Apply 8 lbs 12-4-8 per 1,000 sq ft when green-up begins and again monthly until six weeks before avg first frost date

BERMUDA	Tifway 419	Tift 94	Tifton 10
	The most popular and durable turfgrass for lawns, golf courses, and sports fields. It has a dark green color, forms a dense turf, tolerates heavy use, low temperatures and drought stress very well.	A new, improved sterile triploid hybrid with Mid-Iron cold hardiness and Tifway 419 texture and color. Compared to Tifway, Tift 94 has superior cold hardiness and mole cricket non-preference.	Has a natural dark bluish-green color. Tifton 10 has shown to have more significant winter hardiness when compared to other bermudas. It establishes rapidly from stolons and performs well in low maintenance conditions.
Texture	Fine	Fine	Medium to Coarse
Cold Hardiness	Medium	Excellent	Excellent
Heat Tolerance	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Shade Tolerance	Poor	Poor	Poor
Drought Tolerance	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Maintenance	High	High	Low to Medium

Naming Those Plants

Once upon a time, plants were named whatever the gardener wanted to call them. Eventually this became pretty confusing, and something called the "International Code of Botanical Nomenclature", based on the two-name (binomial) system developed by the botanist Linnaeus, was put into place.

Each plant is given a first and last name, based in either Latin or Greek, that is unique to each species. This name is recognized world-wide, regardless of the native language.

Plants are grouped by their botanical similarities, thus, a botanical family shares characteristics of foliage and flower form. Plants are then grouped by more similar characteristics. The first name of a botanical binomial is the genus name. For instance, within the rose family you would find *Malus* (apples and crabapples), *Rubus* (bramble berries), *Prunus* (peaches, plums, etc.) and finally *Rosa* (the garden roses).

The second name of a botanical binomial is the species name. This narrows down the identity to a specific species of plant. To illustrate, the common name maple denotes a genus of plants known as *Acer*. The sugar maple is a species within the genus *Acer* known botanically as *saccharum*. Therefore, the botanical name for sugar maple is *Acer saccharum*, and is known by that name throughout the world, where the name sugar maple would be met with a wide-eyed stare.

Sometimes a particular species produces a variant from the species that is able to reproduce itself. Peaches, for instance (*Prunus persica*) produced a few trees whose fruit did not

have the normal fuzzy peach skin, but had a smooth skin. Although we know these fruits as nectarines, the botanical name is *Prunus persica* variety *nucipersica*.

Among horticultural plants, new variations of species are often produced through cultivation techniques, hybridization or mutation encouragement. This variation is called a cultivar, shorthand for cultivated variety.

This cultivar name follows the genus and species name, either with or without "cv." in front of it. For instance, the ever popular Patio tomato is, botanically, *Lycopersicon esculentum* 'Patio', or alternatively *Lycopersicon esculentum* cv. 'Patio'.


Incidentally, the genus name is capitalized, while the species name is lower case, but a cultivar name is not only capitalized but enclosed in single quotes.

Compared to gardeners, I think it is generally agreed that others understand very little about anything of consequence.

Henry Mitchell

When writing about a plant, if you are discussing geraniums generally and not a specific one, the name is lower case; when discussing a specific plant you'd use the capitals. Confusing.

While it may seem difficult to pronounce the botanical names, as long as you get the syllables right, it's OK. Gardeners should try to at least know how to find a reference to such names, particularly when buying new plants. Determining the appropriate botanical name is the only sure way to find the right plant in the market place.



FLORAL TRIVIA

Red *Anemones* were thought to take their color from Adonis's blood, white ones from Aphrodite's tears.

Linnaeus called *Amaryllis belladonna* (beautiful lady) for its attractive pink-and-white complexion.

Both the damask rose, *Rosa damascena*, and the damson plum, *Prunus domestica* var. *institia*, take their names from Damascus, whose fruit and flowers have been celebrated since ancient times. The damask rose is the source of attar of roses.

Iris florentinus, the source of orris, is the powdered root still used as a fixative in perfumes. Almost all "violet" scents are derived from orris.

Genista was formerly called *Planta Genista* and became the emblem of the Plantagenets who wore it in their hats in battle.

Cydonia oblonga, the common quince, was once thought to be the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden.

Primula, the primrose, was believed to be magical, healthful and useful as a beauty treatment.

Mountain children liked to carry teaberry (*Gaultheria procumbens*) leaves to church; they chewed them for their wintergreen taste during the long sermons.

Sanguinaria canadensis, bloodroot, was prized by the Indians as a decoration for their faces.

Before You Spray...

Got bugs? You'll be happy to know that chemical pesticides are not usually necessary, despite all the advertising. I know we sometimes panic when we see something wrong with our beloved gardens, and start throwing things at a problem to try to fix it. I think it's kind of like having a new baby/puppy/kitten in the house - we see something that we haven't seen before and worry about it a lot.

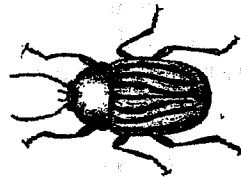
In the case of plants, lots of things can cause things that look similar, so we have to be plant detectives. Do you remember the old line in the movie "don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes"? Pest control is a bit like this.

When I see something like leaf curl in a garden, I turn over a few leaves and look very carefully at the underside. Aphids are usually very obvious. If I see no aphids, I take a piece of white paper (at last, a use for junk mail!) and shake a branch or two over the paper. This will usually dislodge any critters, but I'm especially looking for spider mites. These tiny critters are nearly invisible to me, but sometimes I can see movement on the paper, or I can run my hand across the paper and the squashed spider mites will make streaks of orange, red or brown.

Now - if I find aphids, I also look very carefully for lady bugs, and lady bug babies, which look nothing like their parents. I also look for aphids that look like they're about to explode. These have already been parasitized and will die, and the parasites will continue their work for new generations. In both the above cases, I do nothing. I also look for other good guys in the garden, some ground beetles, lacewings, assassin bugs and others help out a lot. A good book for identifying most garden

pests and benefactors is Rodale's Color Handbook of Garden Insects by Anna Carr (ISBN-87857-460-3).

If I find none of the beneficial insects, and the aphid population is large, I'll use a strong jet of water and my fingers to remove most of them. If they're only on a few leaves at the tips of the branches, which is frequently the case, I'll just snip off the leaves, which gets rid of parents and their eggs. The water treatment (or a spray, for that matter) needs to be repeated every few days for a couple of weeks to get good control. The reason I prefer to use plain water is that it doesn't damage the good guys.



If I can't get good control with just water (rare) my next line of defense would be insecticidal Soap or Ultra-fine Horticultural oil (like Sunspray). Usually, I only have to resort to these in the greenhouse, where there are few natural predators.

Now if you find spider mites, Sevin wouldn't help anyway, as it is an insecticide, which kills insects, not mites. Water works very well on these, as does the ultra-fine oil. There are some miticides which work, but control is difficult, requiring repeat spraying. And they also kill off the beneficial insects which would later take over the job.

If you do need to use anything other than water, always read and follow all label directions exactly. The label directions are there to protect you, the plant and the environment.

So what if you don't find anything bugging your plants?

It may be that you had a pest, but that the beneficials have already taken care of them for you.

It may be that the plant is new and its root systems can't supply enough water to the plant.

It may be that the weather has changed from cloudy and moist to suddenly windy and sunny. Chemical pollutants can cause this, too.

It may be that the roots of the plants have been disturbed by some beast or another, or that when the plants were put into the ground an air pocket was left.

It may be that too much fertilizer was used, or too little.

It may be that a bit of curl is normal for that variety.

It may be that the plant has been kept too wet.

It may be that something has damaged the stem.

So you see, as the old movie goes, "never fire until you see the whites of their eyes."

Daryl Pulis
Forsyth County Master Gardener
Pres., Georgia Master Gardeners

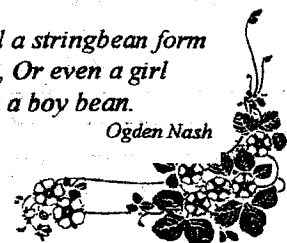


My garden will never make me famous,

I'm a horticultural ignoramus,

I can't tell a stringbean from a soybean, Or even a girl bean from a boy bean.

Ogden Nash





Exploding Bird Myths



There are many myths that will not die flying around in the world of bird watching. They all have in common one thing - that they are not true. You'll hear many of them, but even if you think it is true, track down the information, and that will probably lead you to a dead end.

1.) Rice should not be thrown at the bride and groom at weddings because birds will eat it. It swells up their stomach and they will die, or explode.

If this were true, there would be exploding bird stories on the evening news all across the country. Rice farmers are irritated to distraction by all the birds feasting in rice fields every year. If eating rice caused birds to explode, rice fields would look like popcorn fields instead.

2.) Hummingbirds migrate by riding on the backs of geese.

Excuse me? Except for a few areas in the country, there is no overlap in the migration pattern and timing of geese and hummingbirds. Most hummingbirds are already at the Gulf of Mexico when the first goose sets out. Geese don't go the same places as hummers, anyway. A little ruby-throat waiting for the goose bus is in big trouble.

3.) A gull will explode if you feed it an Alka-Seltzer.

This myth states that when the lethal dose hits the gull's stomach, the expanding gases will cause the bird to explode. If this were true, the coasts of this country would be awash in feathers, and not only would they be on site, but also Jennings and Brokaw. It would probably cause a fair amount of belching in the gull, but after what a gull eats

it would probably do him a world of good.

4.) Red dye in hummingbird nectar is good/bad.

This myth (either way) raises the hackles of everyone who ever set out a hummingbird feeder. Actually, there is absolutely no evidence one way or the other.

Red dye proponents say that it increases the feeder's attraction. The hummers are not attracted by the color of the nectar, but by the little plastic flowers on the feeding port. Color studies on hummers show no proof that the color of the nectar matters.

The no red dye people insist that the colored nectar causes a host of problems and diseases. They will trot out the study done by the San Diego Zoo as proof. In reality, there was no study done by the San Diego Zoo.

5.) Purple martins eat 2,000 mosquitoes a day.

This is one of the most frequently cited "facts" about these birds. There is very little evidence that this is true. It is based on a single bird taken early in the morning over a salt marsh that had 300 mosquitoes in its stomach. By extrapolating this number, it was estimated that the bird would eat 2,000 mosquitoes in one day. There are a number of studies that show that mosquitoes are only a small part of a martin's diet. They show the birds taking a great number and variety of insects, most of them much larger than mosquitoes. Besides, most mosquitoes (except for the imported tiger mosquitoes) are nocturnal. Martins are diurnal. They are both active at dawn and

dusk and while a bird will not refuse a mosquito, pretty soon the birds will be happily roosting in their houses while the pesky pests are just getting started. And another thing - mosquitoes offer virtually no nutritional benefit to the Purple martins.

6.) Parents will abandon a nest if it has been touched by humans.

This is a very popular myth despite the enormous amount of evidence to the contrary. Think about all the zillions of studies that involve monitoring nests, measuring and weighing the young, and all the baby birds that are banded and fledge successfully. Think about all the thousands of bluebird boxes.

Indeed, if birds were repelled by the scent of humans there would be wholesale abandonment of nests every year. Predators, however, will follow a scent trail, and if humans visit a nest too often, those predators may follow the human scent trail to the nests.

There are a host of good reasons for not messing around with bird's nests, but our odor is not one of them.



North American Bluebird Society

The NABS has established a Transcontinental Bluebird Trail to guide and coordinate bluebird trails and to promote their Adopt-A-Box program. Information may be found by writing the NABS, P.O. Box 74, Dept. P, Darlington, Wis. 53530, or visit their internet site at www.nabluebirdsociety.org. You will get information on building a nesting box and information on starting a bluebird trail.



MG Meetings

On Monday, June 21, 1999, about 18 to 20 Master Gardeners assembled at All South Nursery. Half an hour or so was spent looking at statuary, ponds, plants and rocks to be used in and around garden ponds. Johnnie then talked about plants, pumps and liners needed in the construction of ponds. Dan talked about stones for walks, paths, etc.

During the business meeting, Shelia reported \$1300.00 profit from our Spring plant sale. She asked if anyone would be interested in a tour of Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta. We discussed going to Perimeter College (South Campus) for their fall plant sale.

We talked about the Habitat for Humanity project.

It was suggested that we return to the Gibbs garden in the fall.

Shelia said that anyone was welcome to come to her house to get leftover plants from the plant sale.

Meeting was adjourned.



On the evening of Monday, July 19, 1999, about 30 Master Gardeners and friends met at Penny McHenry's home in Northeast Atlanta for a tour of her garden. Penny was the first

President of the American Hydrangea Society. Her garden is full of every imaginable hydrangea plus much more, such as a "gingerbread" house for her grandchildren and an elaborate water garden, and is home to lots of other kinds of plants also.

Refreshments were set out in the garage where a video of flowers from her garden was playing. The garage walls were painted with different types of hydrangeas.

Penny also took the MG's on a tour of the downstairs of her lovely home.

A short meeting by our President, Shelia Wilbur, was held. It was discussed as to where we would have future meetings. Margaret Mosely's garden was named as a place for a meeting. Everyone agreed we would like to revisit the Gibbs garden in the fall.

Dolores Wyland had made 5 tuteurs (French for "to train or teach"). Four were bought up quickly and one was given to Penny as a hostess gift.

Brenda Adams, Secretary



*As a rule man is a fool.
When it's hot he wants
it cool.
When it's cool he wants
it hot
Always wanting what
is not.*

Anonymous

Coming Events

Annual Symposium of the Georgia Native Plant Society

Sat., October 16, 1999
8:30 am to 3:30 pm
Cobb Galleria Conference Ctr

Speakers will include:

Dr. Michael Dirr
"Native Trees and Shrubs"

Darrel Morrison
"Splendor in the (Native) Grasses"

Cost: \$30 members
\$35 non-members

For reservations call 770-343-6000
or visit www.mindspring.com/~gnps

GMGA Meeting

September 11, 1999
Wildlife Federal Building
Conyers, GA

MG Winter Conference

January 8, 2000
Atlanta Botanical Garden

Life in the 1500's, or History you didn't really want to know

Anne Hathaway was the wife of William Shakespeare. She married Will when she was 26, which was pretty unusual at the time. Most women married at 11 or 12. Life back then was not nearly as romantic as we may think.

Anne's home was a 3 bedroom house with a small parlor (seldom used), a kitchen and no bathroom. Her mother and father shared a bedroom. Anne had a queen sized bed, but she had to share it with her two sisters and 6 servant girls. They slept crosswise on the bed, rather than lengthwise as we do. The other bedroom was shared by her 6 brothers and 30 field workers. Everyone wrapped themselves in a blanket and slept on the floor. They had no floor heating, so the accumulated fires kept each other warm. Of course, they were much smaller people than we are today; the men only grew to be about 5'6" and the women 4'8".

Because people took their yearly bath in May, most people got married in June, while they were still fairly clean. The brides would carry bouquets of flowers to hide any odors that had accumulated since their baths.

Their bathtub was just a big tub they would fill with hot water, and the man of the house got the first (and cleanest) bath water. Then all the other sons and men got their turn, followed by the women and finally the children. Last of all came the babies. By then the water was pretty thick. Thus, the saying "don't throw the baby out with the bath water" came about.

Houses had thick thatched roofs, with no wood to speak of underneath. They were the only place



for little animals to get warm so all the pets, dogs and cats, climbed up and spent the nights in the roof. When it rained the thatch became slippery and the animals would slip and fall back into the house. Thus the saying "It's raining cats and dogs".

Most of the houses had dirt floors. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt, generally slate. That's where the saying "dirt poor" came from. But those wealthy ones with slate floors found that in the winter, what with all the rain and slush tracked in, the floors became quite slippery. They started spreading thresh, or straw, on the floors to help keep their footing, and would add more and more as the winter went on. They put a piece of wood at the doorway to hold the thresh in place, from whence came the term "thresh hold".

Travelers staying at an inn would buy their dinner there. Bread was divided according to status. The workers would get the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family would get the middle, and guests would get the top, or the "upper crust".

Oftentimes the combination of ale and the lead from lead cups would cause the drinker to fall by the wayside. The family would pick them up and take them home, and get them ready to buy. They realized that

sometimes the person would wake up after a day or two on the kitchen table. The family would gather round and eat and drink, and wait to see if the afflicted one would wake up. That's where the custom of holding a "wake" came from.

Since England is so old and small they began to run out of places to bury people. They started opening coffins and removing the bones, and found that some of the coffins had scratch marks on the inside. One out of 25 coffins were found with these scratches, so they realized they had been burying people who were not really dead. They started tying a string to the wrist of the body and led the string through the coffin and up to the ground, where it would be tied to a bell. Someone would then sit out in the graveyard all night to listen for the bell. That's how the saying "graveyard shift" came into being. If the bell would ring they would know that someone was "saved by the bell" or he was a "dead ringer".

Amazing stuff. If true.



Now close the windows and hush all the fields;

If the trees must, let them silently toss;

No bird is singing now, and if there is,

Be it my loss.

It will be long ere the marshes resume,

*It will be long ere the earliest bird;
So close the windows and not hear the wind,*

But see all wind-stirred.

Robert Frost

Timely Topics UGA Cooperative Extension Service

An old, metal tire rim makes a perfect hanger for your garden hose. Paint it so it blends with the color of your house and hang close to your spigot.

Use a rake or broom to remove debris from your driveway and walkways instead of a spray of water - this helps conserve water.

Wooden handles of your tools should be sanded smooth, if necessary, and painted with water-resistant paint to keep wood from drying out, shrinking or splitting. Using a bright color also makes them easier to spot if left out in the garden.

You should sterilize old flower pots to prevent spreading diseases and insect pests by soaking overnight in a solution of one part bleach to nine parts water.

To ready porch and patio plants to bring inside before the first frost, check under the pots for sowbugs and pillbugs.

You may need to repot tropical flowering plants that have been outside all summer, such as hibiscus, ixora and allamanda. Look at the roots; if they are matted against the outside of the ball, it is time to report. Use a pot at least two times bigger, and a peat-like potting mixture.

Now is a good time to gather ornamental grasses for use in dried arrangements.

Other suitable materials for dried flower arrangements such as okra seed pods, gourds, sumac seed heads, and rose hips may be air dried in a cool, dark location.

(President...)

world.

There were many other great speakers and even an herb cooking class! There was something to interest every gardener on many different levels.

The next International MG Conference will be May 22-26, 2001 in Disney World. It is a great experience - plant to attend if you can.

Georgia is hosting a Regional MG Conference May 14-17, 2000, "A New Century of Gardening in the South", on the campus of UGA. You will be hearing lots more about this in the coming months.

Have a great fall. I hope your plants have survived this hot, dry and humid summer. My weeds have thrived in it.

Fondly,

Shelia

A Bit of Dirt

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Fall