

Yavapai Gardens

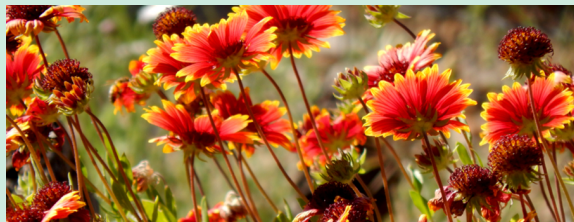
Master Gardener Newsletter

February/March 2018



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Asparagus

by Nora Graf



Patience is the watchword for asparagus. Not a 90-day wonder but it is worth the wait. This garden delicacy will give you years of tender spears if taken care of properly.

First, another one of my history lessons.

The genus *Asparagus* contains about 300 species is found in Europe, Africa and Asia and is a member of the lily family. Its historic range is unknown. Most species are not edible. They tend to be tough climbing plants. The word is a bit confusing (you can look it up if you want) and involves Latin, Greek and Persian. The Greek word *asparagos* first appears in English around A.D. 1000.

Asparagus officinalis L. has been cultivated since the time of the Greeks. A recipe for asparagus occurs in the oldest surviving recipe book. Writings by Pliny the Elder in A.D. 77 mention the production of blanched asparagus by the Romans. Eventually it replaced corn and flax as a major crop in Venice. Louis XIV had greenhouses built to grow it year-round. It came to America with the colonists. A Dutch immigrant who arrived in 1784 is thought to have been the first to bring asparagus. It escaped cultivation in many locations including the western United States and Britain, and is now found “in the wild.” Birds enjoy its red berries and probably spread the seeds in their droppings.

Asparagus has a few requirements that will be important as time goes by. They need a place to stay. The plants will take several years after planting to start producing a reliable quantity of spears. Each time they are moved it will once again take several years to recover. They are very tall plants, up to six feet, and could use some protection from the wind but still get winter sun. Good drainage is important. I would suggest setting aside a large area, as they will spread. You will need quite a few plants to produce enough spears for a family. Avoid areas with Bermuda grass or nutsedge because they will be hard to control in a bed and can overwhelm the plants. Asparagus will grow in clay soils but chances are that it will not do well. Silty or medium-textured-loams are better choices.

Before planting, dig up your soil, break it up and add lots of compost and/or manure to add organic matter. An addition of some ammonium phosphate fertilizer might be helpful also. After the first year a layer of manure or compost should be applied to the top of the bed.

When you purchase asparagus what you are getting are “crowns.” The crown is essentially the root system with the part of the plant



where the stem arises. Crowns are sold as “1-year, 2-year” or “3-year” plants. It has more to do with their size; 3-year plants being the largest, 1 year, the smallest while they are all really just 1-year-old plants. Larger plants tend to be more vigorous growers. Roots can grow from 5 to 6 feet deep. Roots are the storehouses for the sugars the plant uses to start spear production in the spring

You will want to plant the crowns in the spring once the temperature of the soil has reached 50°F. To plant, dig a 10-12 inch hole. Incorporate a phosphorus fertilizer into the soil at the bottom. Plant the crowns 1 foot apart and in rows 4 to 5 feet across. The crowns should be placed in the hole bud side up and the root system spread out. Cover with a layer of soil only one or two inches deep. Add more soil slowly as the stem grows. By early to mid-summer you should have brought the soil level back up to grade. You can continue to add soil to encourage the development of deep crowns. Next comes the hard part—don't pick anything the first year. Yes, I know it will be tempting but this is a case of delaying short-term gratification for a bigger long-term reward. Let the plants grow. Pay no attention to them except to keep them well watered and fertilized. Even as fall comes on resist the temptation to cut them back no matter how unruly they look. You want the plant to be completely dormant before removing any stalks. If you try to remove them before the abscission layer forms you might cause open wounds, opening the plant to disease. Cover the bed with a 4 to 6 inches deep layer of straw, hay, or leaves. This will help keep the soil loose and keep out weeds. Your work is done until spring.

Once spring arrives you can remove all the old dead asparagus stalks, weeds and maybe pick just a few spears this year (the start of the second spring). Repeat with fertilizer, water and wait for



one more year. When that third spring comes around you can start to harvest spears when they reach 7 to 10 inches. The spears grow rapidly and once the fern like leaves start showing it will inhibit the plant from producing more spears. Late frosts can also damage the early spears. Cut the spears underground with a sharp knife. Spears should be tender and green and fairly large during the first cuttings of the year. Over time the spears will start getting smaller. At the point where the diameter is about the size of a pencil or smaller stop picking and allow the plant to grow out for the summer. The growth in the summer sets the plant up for new spears next spring.

When purchasing asparagus crowns keep in mind that male and female flowers are on separate plants. Male plants have been found to be better producers. There are some varieties that will grow in Arizona. Some of the old-fashioned varieties don't like our summer heat so look for UC 157, developed specifically for warmer locations or Jersey Giants and Jersey Knight. Washington varieties are not recommended. Most garden catalogs have asparagus for sale and it can also be found in the spring in nurseries and big box stores. Just make sure it's a variety suitable for our climate.



FYI: White asparagus is green asparagus that is grown under thick layers of mulch or somehow protected from the sun. With no photosynthesis going on, the spears stay white. It is considered more tender and milder in flavor than green. It is preferred in Europe and is rarely found fresh in the US. You can buy jars of it though.

White tends to be more fibrous so the bottom third needs to be peeled before cooking.

Winter Warning



As of early January, we have not had much rain or snow since September. Prescott received just slightly over an inch with the Verde Valley much less. Even though it is winter and

plants are dormant it might be a wise idea to occasionally water your landscape. Plants can survive with a lot less water in winter but it has been particularly warm and dry since the monsoons. Don't overwater but if your soil is hard and dry, the plants might appreciate a drink. Master Gardeners in both the Prescott and Camp Verde offices conveniently have soil probes available for \$5 if you want an easy way to see how dry your soil is.

Meet a Master Gardener—Tricia Michelson

By Linda Guy

"Every human should know how to grow food!" says Tricia Michelson whose homestead clearly demonstrates her commitment to food access and sustainability through edible landscaping or agriscaping. About one-half of her steep, hillside property in the "21 Curves" neighborhood of Prescott is in production: fruit trees, cane fruits, vegetables and herbs. Flowers rarely excite Tricia, unless they attract beneficials or can garnish a salad. Inside, her home's



surfaces are covered with warming pads and grow lights: one of the new ways Tricia is contributing to the Master Gardener Association is as a "Seeder", growing

starts for its annual Monsoon Madness sale. This year she plans to convert an area of her home into a kind of greenhouse, expanding her germinating and homebased hydroponic systems.

Tricia is originally from California and spent most of her adult life in Chandler, AZ. Her interest in cultivating vegetables was kindled by her high school boyfriend's mother, a successful gardener who was undeterred by the growing conditions of Bullhead City, AZ. Before coming to Prescott in 2010, Tricia participated in a small edible-landscape group in the East Valley of metro Phoenix. Since arriving in Yavapai County, her biggest gardening challenges are lack of soil, wildlife exclusion, accommodating knee issues and having enough time to indulge this passion. She runs her own real estate firm of several employees, and is lucky to do so from home where she can take a break with her dogs and her plantings.

Inventive hardscaping for both animal exclusion and ergonomic functionality are prominent in her landscape. As the rustic fences were being built, Tricia tested building the gabions (wire enclosures of rock) around trash cans to provide more planting options; she is still evaluating the results. She has the usual raised beds, containers and a few EarthBox® planters. Elsewhere culvert pipes from 1 to 3 feet in diameter are upended to an elevation of 3 to 4 feet, each filled



with soil and planted quite fruitfully with asparagus, herbs, tomatoes, squashes, peppers and much more. Minimal bending! All this food is shared with friends, dried in dehydrators, made into leathers, frozen or kept in cold storage in the garage.

Tricia designed her own eco-friendly rainwater collection system. A 500-gallon tank adjacent to her house collects runoff from a 3,000 square foot roof (she has a BIG garage). A sump pump then moves the water to a 1,700-gallon storage unit on the hilltop. Gravity takes care of the distribution. Installed in 2013 with considerable jack hammering, Tricia believes her investment will break even in 4 to 5 years.

In true citizen-scientist fashion, Tricia loves to test new plants and conduct experiments. Two years ago her kiwi initiative was overcome by packrats. Raspberry and grapes planted in 2016 show signs of progress. Most recently she compared the use of hot pads to a regular surface when germinating seeds under grow lights. The outcome? While the hot pad germination rate was exponentially faster, within 5 weeks both sets of plants were equal in size and sturdiness, suggesting that hot pads are useful when a gardener is getting a late start in the season. This is



her year to test microgreens, and she will plant both hydroponically and in the soil to compare her results.

Tricia has

accumulated over 500 volunteer hours since becoming a Master Gardener in 2013. After counting money at that year's plant sale, she became Treasurer, a position she continues to hold but would love to pass on to another able



MG. This would free her to expand her vision for our Speakers Bureau, which she also directs. Tricia seeks ways to move the Master Gardener Association more prominently into the public eye, through more outreach and coordination between the two sections of Yavapai County. She loves our wonderfully eclectic group of people whom she wouldn't have met any other way. Her advice to new Master Gardeners? "Find your passion and get involved!"

Garden Art

by Nora Graf

With a little time between major gardening projects, you might have some time on your hands. My idea is to turn your energy to creating some garden art. Now I get that some people don't like garden art, but it can add a splash of color and whimsy to a garden. It might also be a fun project you can do with the kids or grandkids.

Colander wind chimes planter



What you will need: metal colander (you can often find these in thrift stores), spray paint for metal (color of your choice), spoons, measuring spoons, whatever you think would look cool, 9 foot metal chain (not too heavy),

single ring key rings, drill with bit to go through metal, and measuring tape. If you are going to plant in it you will need a cocoa fiber liner and potting



soil. Spray paint the exterior of the colander. Attach the key rings to the spoons and some to the base of the colander. Use the chain to attach the spoons to the colander. Drill three

holes at the top equidistant to attach chain to create a hanging basket.



Crystal or fairy light watering can



What you will need: metal watering can with removable head, fishing line, a variety of different sizes and shapes of beads and (battery operated) fairy lights made for outdoors. You might need something to enlarge the holes in the shower head. Fairy lights are sold in most craft and hardware stores and big box stores, especially at Christmas time. Make sure you buy outdoor lights. If you are doing the beaded project, simply string your beads and run fishing line through the holes. With the fairy lights you might have to enlarge the holes.

Remove the shower head from the watering can and set aside.

Using a screwdriver (or your tool of choice), make the holes bigger on the shower head of the watering can.

Place the lights inside the watering can and push them up and out of the spout.

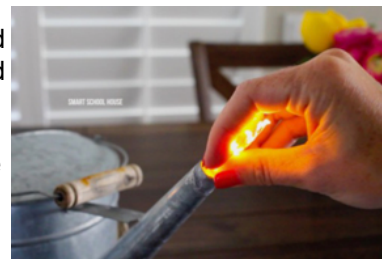
One by one, feed the strings of fairy lights through shower head.

Gently place the shower head back on the watering can.

Hang the watering can on a hook

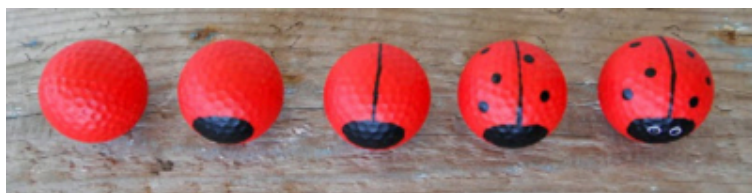
"Fluff" the lights over your garden or plants so they look like they're all going in the same direction.

Turn on the lights and enjoy!



Garden Bugs

What you will need: golf balls, paint primer, outdoors craft paints, brushes, some type of outdoor finish spray, and some kids who like to paint. Spray the balls with primer and then let the kids go wild to create their own bugs for the garden. The kids have fun and you have bugs that won't eat your garden. Win Win!



Hubcap Art

Give the hubcap a good scrubbing to remove all the grease and road residue. Spray with a primer. (Older metal hubcaps will need a different primer than the newer plastic ones) You can use spray paint to cover overall or any good quality outdoor acrylic paint. Use your imagination for the design and have fun.



Walking Sticks

Phasmatodea (or Phasmida) Family

Diapheromera arizonensis

by Nora Graf



Every day we go out to the garden and grapple with insect damage. Between flea beetles, other beetles, aphids, squash bugs, caterpillars and many others it is

amazing that we even have gardens some days. The focus is on how to get rid of insects, and gardeners devote a lot of time trying to destroy them. But insects are interesting and very diverse creatures and good for us. Not all are trying to destroy our garden. One of the interesting ones you frequently see is the walking stick.

Not surprisingly walking sticks resemble their name. Their Latin family name, Phasmatidae, comes from the Greek word "Phasma" which means phantom or apparition. They have an adaptation called crypsis which allows them to blend in with their environment. In their case, they look like sticks. The Arizona species is around 3 inches long and brown but different species can range from the tiny ½ inchers to the almost scary 20+ inch ones. Depending on species they may be green, brown or gray.

Walking sticks have an exoskeleton of three parts: head, thorax and abdomen. The head contains the brain, eyes and mouth. The thorax contains the vital organs and is where the three pair of legs attach and, in some species, wings. Some species have wings that look like leaves. In Arizona, they just look like sticks.

They do eat plants and have been known to denude their favorites but are not considered



destructive garden pests. They prefer native plants like globe mallows, creosote, burro weed and deer weed.

Walking sticks have predators. Birds, reptiles, spiders and bats will eat them—well at least try to eat them. They have glands that release noxious chemicals, discouraging predators from coming around a second time. Their first line of defense though, is their stick-likeness. They are hard to see and if the plant moves they move in a way that looks just like a branch in the wind by moving their legs randomly. If they fall or get knocked off the plant, they will remain still for a long period of time looking like a stick on the ground. When grabbed by a predator they remain stiff in the hopes that the predator will think it is a stick and drop them. If you haven't already seen one, you now know they look like, well, sticks.

Surprisingly I often see them on the sides of buildings. Since they are hard to see on plants, it is perhaps easy to assume they live on the sides of buildings, but no. They are plant eaters and if you see one on a wall there are probably many more on the surrounding plants that you never see. If you see a stick moving about, hanging around on your walls, just have a look at it. They are interesting and harmless, but leave them alone. People do keep them as pets but they have fragile legs that are easily damaged and, like all wild creatures, do best in the



Cichorium intybus

Chicory

by Nora Graf



Originally from the Mediterranean, this plant became a world traveler, now growing throughout the northern hemisphere and is fairly common in Arizona. It has many common names, including blue daisy, blue dandelion, blue sailors, horseweed, coffeeweed, cornflower and wild endive.

Chicory has a long history and was first mentioned during Roman times. The Egyptians cultivated it. It was planted by humans to use as salad greens and cattle forage, and the root as a substitute for coffee. When Frederick the Great banned the importation of coffee in 1766, chicory roots

were used as a coffee substitute. The confederate soldiers in the Civil War used it as a coffee replacement, which is when its use became common in the United States. During the 1930's depression and World War II when coffee was scarce or expensive, it once again used as a coffee substitute. In some parts of the country it is still used today.

Chicory is a perennial with a milky juice. It has a deep taproot. The plant grows from one to six feet tall and has spreading branches. It starts out as a rosette of toothed leaves. The flowers can be blue, purple or white and up to 1 1/2 inches in diameter. The plant blooms from July to December. It can be an aggressive grower. Each plant can produce around 3000 seeds. In young turf it can be a problem, especially in areas where the grass is cut less than two inches.

It is found on roadsides and in disturbed areas and tolerates many different soil types. The leaves are bitter but cooking and discarding the water removes some of the bitterness.

Wild chicory is closely related to radicchio and Belgian endive.



Orecchiette with chicory and Andouille chicken sausage

- 1 pound orecchiette pasta
- 1 head of chicory leaves, halved lengthwise and washed
- 4 Andouille sausages
- Juice from ½ a lemon
- Olive oil
- Salt, pepper and garlic powder to taste

Cook pasta according to the package instructions. The longer the chicory leaves are, the easier they'll be to grill, so carefully halve the head length wise, and gently trim the edges. Wash the leaves, discarding any yellowed ones, and pat dry. Brush the leaves with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. When the grill is hot, turn off one of

the burners and cook the chicory over indirect heat, turning once or twice, about 4-5 minutes on each side or until tender. Grill the sausage while the chicory is cooking. Remove everything from the grill, chop the chicory into bite size pieces, slice the sausage diagonally and add to a bowl with the cooked pasta. Toss with olive oil, lemon juice, salt, pepper and garlic powder to taste. Serve warm with crusty bread.



Damping-Off

Damping-off is a serious problem for young seedlings, but it is preventable. Since a number of people are going to be starting seeds soon for Monsoon Madness and others for their own garden, I thought the following bulletin from Mary Olsen from the University of Arizona would provide information on causes and how you can prevent it. You will have to copy and paste the link into your browser. If you can't copy and paste, just search for **AZ1029 University of Arizona** and it should be at the top of the list on your search page.

<https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1029.pdf>

Annual DVOS Orchid Show, April 7 and 8 - 2018

April 7 (Saturday) 9-5pm, April 8 (Sunday) 10-4pm

Berridge Nurseries

4647 E Camelback Rd

Phoenix, AZ 85018

<http://www.dvos-az.com/>

Lots of orchids for sale and many beautiful orchids on display. Learn to grow orchids, repot them and bloom them at one of our daily classes held at 12 and 2pm.



2017 Newsletter Deadline Schedule

The newsletter comes out every two months. Please note the deadlines.

Publish	Date	Deadline
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Feb-Mar	Feb 1	Articles Jan 5, announcements Jan 25
April-May	April 1	Articles March 5, announcements Mar 25
June-July	June 1	Articles May 5, announcements May 25
Aug-Sept	Aug 1	Articles July 5, announcements July 25
Oct-Nov	Oct 1	Articles Sept 5, announcements Sept 25
Dec-Jan	Dec 1	Articles Nov 5, announcements Nov 25

From the Editor: Send or email articles to the address below. Email is preferred. Please see schedule for deadlines.

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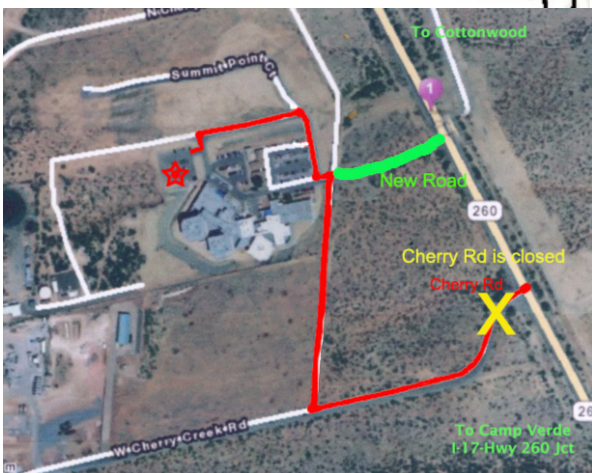
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MG NEWSLETTER



Next Meetings

February 21, Prescott, 6:30pm

March 21, Camp Verde, 6:30 pm,

For those coming to the Camp Verde Meeting please remember there is still road work happening on Hwy 260, please use caution. Completion of the work is estimated to be late summer. While the construction is going on the entrance to the Camp Verde meeting site and Extension Office has changed. Please see the map.