The Urge to Purge
by Patti Conrad

A new year brings with it a desire for reflection, self-examination and divestiture of needless clutter. As it is in all areas of our lives, so it is in the gardening world when Spring comes. Since I am a pack-rat personality, this is quite a challenge for me no matter what category of life I am dealing with. I like antiques. Collecting teapots, bird statues and bird houses, and old garden tools adds a lot of clutter but these items are not going anywhere—at least not yet. At least these items do not have to be planted, pruned, fed, watered, sprayed, protected from animals, and mulched. Besides their collecting a little dust, (a fine collectible in its own right,) they’ll peacefully stand in my house and garden. All I have to do is enjoy them. As a bonus, spiders love to live around and in the bird houses which thus are doing double-duty as bird nurseries and Spider Diners.

As a plant collector, it is a passion and part of my job. I test-drive new plants and old favorites in new locations and combinations. For most people this would be frustrating and expensive, so I recommend the philosophy of “plant what works in YOUR garden for YOUR green thumb and LOTS of IT!” Here is where the purging comes...
in. You can have a lovely garden with a lot less work if you objectively assess your plants to see which types of plants are growing best for you. Iris and I do not connect, for example. You may do really well with mugo pines and herbs or pen-stemons and junipers. In each category of plant there are many types, so you can do a variation-on-a-theme motif. You could plant mugo pines, both clipped and natural, and other pines such as dwarf Scotch and Austrian along with six different types of thyme and a half dozen sages. Voila! A garden that looks difficult and interesting but is really a snap for you to nurture. Remember that the idea is to get what you want but to “simplify, simplify, simplify.” (I borrowed that from Thoreau, but if he actually wanted to simplify, why didn’t he use the word just once?) Go figure.

It doesn’t matter how pretty a plant is, if it keeps dying on you or isn’t doing well in your patch of soil, get rid of it and don’t buy it again. Purge your piece of paradise of those bad-mannered wimps that fret and fuss and put in happy plants instead. Give them away or do them in. My mottoes are “when in doubt, yank it out” and “if it won’t thrive, it won’t be alive.” It seems harsh but nature is ruthless. We can learn from her. Besides you are doing the plants a favor by finding them a home or saving them from a slow lingering death by yanking them out and composting them. Help them on to plant heaven via composting reincarnation.

Remember, there is a difference between thriving and surviving. A thriving plant is easier to care for and looks better in the garden. If marigolds love you, learn to love yellow and orange and stop wishing that they came in blue. Embrace reality.

Purge the inanimate from your life also. Toss out those plastic pots or recycle them to garden centers or nurseries. Watters Garden Center in Prescott on Iron Springs Rd would love to recycle your 1 gallon size and larger pots, as would Prescott Valley Growers in Prescott Valley on Hwy 69. I asked them. Certainly other garden centers in the County would want them, too. A couple of broken red clay pots would be plenty for shards; use the rest as paving material for a walkway or make a mosaic coffee table. Otherwise, have the trash pick up a few per week, if necessary. I prefer to use small square pieces of used window screen over the drain holes instead of the shards. They are neater and store in a small space.

I am also a printed-work junkie, reading anything with words on it—road signs, brochures and old newspapers. So you see, parting with any of my books is out of the question. I love them all. Besides, I may NEED them. They are useful for reference, pressing flowers and leveling tables. To save you from my fate, here is a short list of must-haves for the bookshelf.

Onward and Upward in the Garden, by Katharine S. White is a hybrid between philosophy and instruction tomes. What a gal! She’s a real straight talker. Judith Phillips’ two book set, Natural by Design and Plants for Natural Gardens are guides for lovers of native plants. She teaches you how to effectively use natives in home landscape as well as discusses their care and propagation. They are not field identification guides. They are useful for mixing existing native plants with introduced garden species in a pleasing and harmonious manner. They are two great books that may be purchased singly or as a set that are worth the price.

Of course, if you really want to simplify your library, the one book to have is the Sunset Western Garden Guide, an encyclopedia and bible reference for the gardener. I actually prefer the 1995 edition with the yellow flowers on the cover.
and 624 pages over the 2001 edition with the coral-pink roses on the cover and 768 pages because they dropped the mail order suppliers guide from the resource section and the paper quality seems inferior. Mail order supplies can change unexpectedly so that could be why they deleted it but it gave people a good starting point with reputable companies. On the bright side, you can now buy a used copy of the 1995 edition for a good price and put those extra dollars into fertilizers instead. Buy both if you can afford it.

The last book of my recommendations is the Undaunted Garden by Lauren Springer. As with Judith Phillips, Lauren Springer is a realist and a clear thinker. Any gardening book by either of these authors would be worth owning. Undaunted Garden is about gardening at a 5000 foot plus elevation and climate similar to the mountain areas of Prescott-Flagstaff-Payson. On the downside, sometimes Springer’s plant choices are not readily available from local nurseries or indeed from mail order sources but you can find substitutes in the same plant families that will work just fine.

Regarding the category of garden catalogs, I receive lots of individual catalogs from dozens of suppliers each year but there are only a few that I really order from: some of these I have been using for 20 years or more. The other catalogs I receive I keep anyway for their reference value. I may be tempted by that rare variegated juniper, but when I find that it costs $35.00 for me to get a 3-inch-tall start in a 4 inch pot, I change my mind. I do enjoy toying with the idea, picturing the juniper full size in my garden, situated just there. Fortunately, reality strikes through the steam rising from my teacup and I see clearly once more.

Through years of experience, I would always choose the plant in hand, the seen-in-person plant at a garden center that I can buy locally instead of mail order. Not because the plants are better but because dirt costs a lot to ship. “Dirt cheap” is wrong. Dirt is heavy and expensive if you mail it. Big plants are heavy, too. You will get a plant that is much smaller than you expect. Buy in person whenever possible. When I could not get what I wanted, I have ordered plants, seeds and bulbs from the following companies:

- Bluestone Perennials—perennials of all types, some shrubs and grasses (800)852-5243
- High Country Gardens—Natives, perennials, shrubs, grasses (800)925-9387
- Schreiner’s Gardens—Iris of all types (800)525-2367 x 50
- Dutch Gardens—Bulbs of all types, high quality, some unusual types (800)775-2852
- Thompson-Morgan Seeds—Seeds (800)274-7333

There are thousands of suppliers, so you could garden on the internet and never get your hands dirty. I prefer to narrow my scope and get on with it. Laying out the catalogs on the table for comparison shopping, I find it easier to flip back and forth through paper pages with bookmarks than to click, click, click through an internet catalog. Then I have to change sites and click, click, click again. I cannot compare twelve varieties of penstemons from four companies at once on the computer but I can do this at my desk with paper pages of real catalogs. I have tried both methods and I prefer not to jump over the inter-“net” and get stuck in the “web.” Remember, the idea is to get what you want but to simplify, simplify, simplify—oops, sorry! Please delete two of those simplifies.

(Ed. Note: I agree it’s easier to search through paper catalogs but most sites have a place to request a copy of their catalog from the website and, once you have an order ready, you can order from the website.)
This member of the sunflower family is one of the few that is cultivated as a food source rather than just an ornamental. Its fleshy rhizomes are edible. The tubers are sweet but, because their sugars contain insulin rather than starches and sucrose sugars, they are good for diabetics. Tubers also contain free glutamine and are high in amino acids, sparking a resurgence of interest in eating and growing them.

In spite of its name, the plant is native to North America. It is found from Ontario to the southern United States. The history of the name is confused. Some think it is a corruption of “girasole,” Italian for sunflower or turning to the sun, others think that Jerusalem is a corruption of Terneuzen, the place in Holland from where artichokes were first introduced to England in 1617.

Jerusalem artichokes were cultivated or collected from the wild by the Indians before the 16th century. The early tubers that made it to Europe were larger than wild ones, so it is thought they were cultivated varieties that had been selected for their larger size.

The plants thrive in many kinds of soil and full sun. In heavy soils they may grow rather unevenly and knobby. They are generally propagated from tubers which can be cut like potatoes, one eye to each piece. Harvest in the fall after frost has killed the top or about a month after the plant flowers. The plant can be invasive and spread via the rhizomes into nearby beds if they aren’t dug each year.

Plant after the last frost in the spring or in the fall about three inches deep and 12 to 18 inches apart.

With the typical yellow sunflower flower they can be used as an ornamental but they can grow over six feet tall. Once in, though, they are difficult to get rid of. If you want to use them near flower or vegetable beds, you might want to think about a way of containing them.

One of the drawbacks is the difficulty in peeling them, as they tend to be knobby and rough. One source suggested eating them with the peel. You’ll have to experiment to find what you like. Another problem is that they promote flatulence. An 18th century appellation applied to them was “windy root.” No doubt it is a vegetable to be eaten in moderation. A few varieties like Fuseau, Garnet and Stampede have been selected for smoother tubers and are probably the ones you can find in stores marked as Sunchookes or Sunroots.

Over the years a number of varieties have been developed that appear under varietal names but some varieties have more than one name. This can be confusing if you plan on going into extensive gardening of this vegetable. The best source of tubers or seeds is through Seed Savers Exchange. They list a huge number of varieties in their seed listing. Some varieties to look for are Jack’s Copperclad, Mulles Roce and Waldoboro Gold.

Chokes can be cooked in a variety of ways; the simplest is to toss the unpeeled tubers into a barbeque fire or to put them in a pan while cooking a roast. At 350° they will take about 30 minutes to cook. They can also be boiled or sautéed.
Stir Fry Chokes and Broccoli

serves 6-8, recipe is from “The Victory Garden Cookbook” by Marian Morash

1 bunch fresh broccoli
1/2 lb Jerusalem artichokes
2 Tbsp. Lemon juice
1 Tbsp. Cornstarch (optional)
1/4 cup water (optional)
1 Tbsp. Soy sauce (optional)
3 Tbsp. Cooking oil
1 1/2 tsp. Finely minced ginger root
1/2 tsp. Salt
2/3 cup chicken stock or water
2 Tbsp. Butter

Wash broccoli, remove flower buds from stalks, peel and cut into 1-inch-diameter pieces. Peel stalks, slice down and cut into 1 1/2 inch pieces. Slice chokes into rounds and keep in 1 quart water to which the lemon juice has been added. If you wish to thicken the finished dish, mix together cornstarch, water, and soy sauce and set aside.

Heat oil until very hot, add ginger, stir for 10 seconds. Add broccoli and cook for 2 minutes, stirring until all sides are coated with oil and slightly cooked, then add salt and stir for another minute. Pour in stock or water, bring to a boil, cover pan, turn heat to medium, and braise the broccoli for 5 to 10 minutes or until tender but still crisp. Meanwhile, dry the chokes. When the broccoli is tender, uncover and reduce remaining liquid to 3 tablespoons, then add butter and chokes. Stir for 30 seconds or just to warm through. If you would like a sauce, add the cornstarch mixture along with the chokes and stir until stock is thickened.

You can add 1/2 lb of meat to create a full meal. Thinly slice the meat and sauté in hot oil. Set aside and return to pan just before you add the chokes. You may want to increase the amount of sauce.

You can receive the Seed Savers Exchange seed list by joining the organization. For information write:

Seed Savers Exchange
3076 N. Winn Road
Decorah, Iowa 52101

Dear Yavapai County Master Gardeners,

Please feel welcome to drop in and audit lectures during the 2002 Master Gardener Course. The room is large. However, this year’s participants will have priority on seats at tables. I hope to see you there or at the Master Gardener Association Meetings.

Yavapai County Master Gardener Schedule – Spring 2002
Verde Valley Fairgrounds, Professional and Amateur Arts Building, Cottonwood, Arizona

All classes will meet between 9:00 AM and 12:30 PM on dates listed below

3/6, Plant Propagation, Terry Mikel
3/13, Plant Pathology (Disease), Mary Olsen
3/20, Vegetables and Annuals, Terry Mikel
3/27, Insects and Integrated Pest Management, TBA
4/3, Pesticide Safety, Jeff Schalau
4/10, Fruit Trees and Vines, Mike Kilby
4/17, Backyard Wildlife Conflicts, Larry Sullivan
4/24, Final Exam, Jeff Schalau
Another member of the sunflower family Compositae. (I understand that they have renamed the family Asteracea, but I think they will always be composites to me.) It’s actually a thistle. The history of the plant starts with the Greeks and Romans, probably as the Cardoon. Young leaves and flower stalks were eaten from this plant. Greeks and Romans would grow plants in the dark to create white and tender parts. Cardoon was one of the most popular garden plants in Rome in 100AD. It was used as a potherb and as a salad plant. The modern artichoke probably developed from this plant. It appears in literature in 77AD. North African Moors near Granada Spain cultivated artichokes around 800 AD. From there it made its way to England around 1548. The English apparently were not fond of it. The Spanish then sent it to California in the late 1600’s. They didn’t catch on in America particularly fast either. It wasn’t until the 1920’s that they were widely grown. California turned out to be a perfect location for them. In 1922, Andrew Molera decided to try artichokes on former sugar beet land because they were fetching higher prices than sugar beets. The rest, they say, is history. By 1929 they were the third largest cash crop in Salinas Valley. Today Castroville, California, is hailed as the Artichoke capit of the world. Marilyn Monroe was Artichoke Queen in 1948. Artichokes are the official vegetable of Monterey County and the value of the 1994-5 crop was more than $46.3 million dollars.

For all its Spanish origins, the name artichoke comes from the northern Italian words articiocco and articoclos. The words are related to the Ligurian word cocali, meaning a pine cone.

Artichokes are perennials. They are large perennials. At their fullest growth they can be as large as six feet in diameter and three to four feet high. The grayish green leaves are long and arching and serrated. What we eat is the flower bud. If left to bloom they would open into a large, seven inch, violet purple thistle blooms. The blooms are quite spectacular and I would suggest if you grow artichokes to let one bud actually bloom sometime. Oddly enough, it was the leaves that were first eaten. If you have ever seen the plant, you might wonder why but the concept that everyone likes different things applies here; it might be an inherited taste, who knows. The bud at the top is the terminal bud. Buds lower on the plant tend to be smaller. The smallest are those closest to the bottom and shaded by the upper leaves.

Commercially, artichokes are propagated vegetatively. Cuttings are made of the stem with some roots attached. After each cropping cycle, the plant is cut back to encourage growth of new shoots. In California, artichokes are grown year round, with March to May the peak period and a second peak in October. In our climate you should start with seeds (two sources are listed below.) In colder areas, grow them as an annual. Start seeds indoors early, about the same time as tomatoes, 8
to 10 weeks before you are ready to plant outdoors. When soil warms, plant them at least three feet apart in a fertile soil. Because of their rapid growth and size, they are heavy feeders. Enrich soil with manure or compost. Then water—they like lots of water. Soil should be evenly moist. In hot weather they will wilt quickly if they do not have enough water. They can also be like squash and not be able to move enough water in their leaves during the hottest part of the day, even if the soil is moist. They will recover in the evening as it cools. In the colder areas, the roots can be dug up and stored where they won’t freeze; in other areas, try mulching heavily.

Aphids can be a pest, along with slugs and snails, when the plants are small. The simplest aphid control is spraying the plant with a stream of water.

One of the reasons artichokes tend to be a bit expensive is that they are very labor-intensive to plant and harvest. Both operations are done mostly by hand. As artichokes don’t all ripen at the same time, workers must go into the fields repeatedly to harvest. As small gardeners it’s really easy to pick a few for the dinner table every few days. Pick when they are about the size of a tennis ball. If you wait too long, the thistle bloom will be too far along. The smaller ones near the base of the plant can be picked golf-ball size.

This treat is no fast food, either to prepare or eat. The whole artichoke can be steamed, but each leaf is eaten separately by stripping it from the bud and pulling the end, after it’s been dipped in a little butter, and the soft inner flesh stripped from the tough outer fibers. When you get to the center you will find a soft fuzzy portion, this is the new flower developing. This portions can be easily removed to reach the soft, tender “heart” underneath. I’m particularly fond of the “baby artichokes” you can sometimes find. They tend to be a bit more tender and are too small to have developed the flower. The only place I’ve consistently found them though is at Trader Joe’s in Phoenix, so if you are heading south, you might try stopping in.

Nutritionally the artichoke is a source of vitamin C, folate and potassium, low in sodium, fat free, except for that butter dipping, and only has 25 calories. Since you expend that many calories eating it, the calorie issue can be a wash. They also make wonderful vessels for stuffing and can be added to stir-fry and pasta dishes.

Artichoke seeds are available in catalogs although they are not common. Two sources I found are:

The Cooks Garden
P.O. Box 535
London, VT 05148
(800) 457-9705
They have two varieties a purple, Violetto and a green, Imperial Star

Nichols Garden Nursery
www.nicholsgarden.com
(800) 422-3985
1190 Old Salem Road NE
Albany, OR 97321-4580
They carry Imperial Star
Magic Fruit in a Bottle

Most people have seen a whole fruit in a bottle that has a top that you could barely get a grape into. Actually, there is no magic to it, just some preplanning. This works for apples and pears the best. Grapes can be containerized also but they do not always develop fully, for some reason.

After the blooms fall and you can see the young fruit, select the fruit on a long stem. Remove all extra growth along that stem the length of the bottle. Slip the bottle over the fruit, positioning the fruit in the widest part of the bottle. Secure the bottle to a sturdy stake. Tie the branch to the stake, also, to stabilize it. Do several bottles, as there is not a guarantee that all the fruit will develop well. Shade the fruit, if not shaded by the tree, by slipping a paper bag over the bottle during the sunniest part of the day. The bag should be torn open so that the shady side is open. It should not be covered day and night, only from about 10:30am to 4pm. The extra care will insure that the fruit develops fully. Harvest when the fruit develops its mature color. Bottle can be refilled and the mix can be kept indefinitely. The fruit will slowly lose its color. A bit of branch can be left on. It will color gin or vodka a delicate gold color. Remove it, if you plan on using brandy, to avoid a woody taste. Before adding a liquor, rinse out the bottle with cool water. Do not bruise the fruit. Turn bottle upside down for a couple of days to allow bottle and fruit to drain.

Fill with brandy, vodka or gin; close with a tight stopper or cork. Let set at least two weeks. Bottle can be refilled and the mix can be kept indefinitely. The fruit will slowly lose its color.

March Calendar

It will be warm enough this month to start planting some annuals and perennials. Also gladiolus, bearded iris and dahlia can go in. Divide and re-plant chrysanthemums.

Get your herbs started.

Plant early spring vegetables. Peas, radishes, leaf lettuces and spinach are all good cool weather crops. Later in the month start the root crops, carrots, turnips, rutabagas, beets and cabbages.

Prune hedges.

Strawberries can be planted now. A good strawberry bed needs lots of organic material. Asparagus and grapes can still go in, also.

Check fruit trees for twig borers. Look for twigs with a drop of resin. Snip off suspected twig tips. Spray trees with dormant oil if they haven’t started to leaf out. It’s been a warm winter so it wouldn’t surprise me if a few get started a little early this year.

Prune Roses through mid-March, feed also. Remove soil and debris that have built up around the graft.

There is still time to plant bareroot stock

An interesting tip from National Gardening Magazine (which is now defunct). They found that in the case of annuals do not untangle root-bound plants. In annuals the roots quickly send out new roots unlike perennials, trees and shrubs. So just stick those root-bound babies in the soil. Make sure the soil is moist and makes good contact with the roots.
Are you a Sponge? Do you want to learn new things, see new sights. Soak up new experiences? Come on the Master Gardener Field Trip to the Arboretum in Flagstaff on Saturday June 15, 2002. It’s their annual Horticultural Fair with educational exhibits and talks, and a plant sale which includes hard-to-find plants such as certain species of penstemons. The van will be filled on a first come basis. Call Pattie at (928) 778-4810 to reserve your seat on the van. If you want to follow in your own car, that’s ok too. Please call and let Pattie know you are coming so she can give you the information you need.

Desert Botanical Gardens
Phoenix, March 15, (members only day) 16 & 17

Boyce Thompson Arboretum
March 15 – 30 8am - 5pm, 60 miles east of Phoenix on Hwy 60. Admission $6.00 adults, $3.00 children.

Herb Festival April 13m 7am - 3pm (not a plant sale but thought you might be interested anyway)

Tohono Chul Park, Tucson
March 16, 17, 7366 N. Paseo del Norte (520) 742-6455
http://www.tohornochulpark.org

The "Arizona Master Gardener Manual" is now on-line. Check out http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/mg/

NOTE FROM THE EDIT OR:
Let me know about your garden, the types of seeds you planted, interesting articles you found—anything of gardening interest. Send to:
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