One of the more interesting family of plants I came across while taking a plant taxonomy class years ago were the members of the milkweed family. They have this interesting method of pollination. Anyway, it’s the way you can fit milkweeds into your garden and which ones to choose that I am going to talk about.

Note: Milkweeds are called milkweeds because of their milky saps which flow quite readily when the stem is broken. It can cause irritation and with some species the sap is toxic to livestock. Carolus Linnaeus (the father of taxonomy) named the plants after Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, because the plant was used commonly for medicinal purposes. You might want to check out its ability to remove warts, or so they say.

The most common one you will find in nurseries is Butterfly weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*. True to its name it is a butterfly magnet but it also attracts hummingbirds. (Most milkweeds are really good at attracting butterflies and other insects.) Its range is across North America is from sea level to 7000 feet. The flowers range from bright orange to yellows. It has a heavy, grass-like growth that creates a very vertical profile. It will grow three feet high and spread two to three feet wide. Its cold tolerance seems to be in question, one source says low 20’s another says -30. Either way it should survive our winters, most of the time, anyway. It will go dormant in the winter and at that time you can cut the stems back to ground level. Do not prune when the weather is hot.

The plant looks good next to boulders and planted with a low growing flowering plant underneath to complement it. If you purchase one of these plants from a catalog I would suggest you purchase one from a grower that is nearby. Apparently the plant’s tolerance for different conditions varies depending on where it came from. So purchasing one that was grown in the southwest will likely have a better chance of surviving here than one that comes from the midwest or east.

Another species is *Asclepias subulata*, or the Desert Milk-
weed. This plant will work best in the lower areas of Yavapai county as it is only hardy to 20°F. This is an evergreen shrub that is native to southeastern California and southwestern Arizona. In its native environment it is found from sea level to 2500 feet but one source said that it can grow to elevations up to 3000 feet. It will grow three to five feet tall and three feet wide. Its look may not be everyone's cup of tea—it has a very architectural quality with leafless, gray-green foliage that gives it a heavy grass-like effect. The flowers are cream-colored and attract a variety of butterflies. The seed pods that form after the flowers are also attractive. It needs a bit of extra moisture or else the stems will deteriorate. Every few seasons trim the stems to the ground in late winter. Good soil drainage is a must.

Another Arizona native is the Pineleaf Milkweed or *Asclepias linaria*. It has a wide range of habitats and elevations, growing from 1500 to 6000 feet, preferring rocky slopes, canyons and arroyos. It is a butterfly plant. This species has needle like leaves about 1 1/2 inch long and upright stems. It is an evergreen plant and the base of the stem can be woody looking. The size of the plant averages 2 feet high and 3 feet wide. It has white flowers in clusters that can be 2 inches across. Pineleaf has a long blooming season, running from March through October. Seed pods are papery and about 2 inches long. Like most of our native plants, drainage is important. Soaking the plant once or twice a month during the hottest, driest months will improve its appearance. It is cold-hardy to about the mid-20's. Like other milkweeds, its sculptural appearance needs a place to show off. Next to a wall or in mass plantings of at least three plants have the best effect.

*Asclepias asperula*, the Plains Milkweed is another possibility. A native of the southwest and northern Mexico, it is also known as Antelope Horns. This is a lower-growing type reaching only about 18 inches tall. It forms clumps of slender stems with small leaves. The flowers are creamy pale green with dark purple centers. They are long-blooming. It is poisonous to livestock.

One more milkweed you might come across is one that may not be as welcome as others. While it attracts butterflies and is an attractive plant, it can be a bit annoying (this is from personal experience). This is the Narrow-leaf climbing Milkweed, *Sarcostemma* (or *Funastrum*) *cyanochondes*. It is a perennial vine with stems that can grow 8 to 40 feet long. It has narrow, arrow shaped leaves and umbels of white to purplish fragrant flowers. The problem is that it can grow 40 feet long and really overwhelm other things in the garden. Mine started along a fence far away from everything and it was kind of cool. But it sends seeds far and wide and next thing I know it's growing next to a rose. This is a big rose but every year I have to rip away the vines which would otherwise completely hide the rose by summer’s end. Now I have it growing in other parts of the yard and, while it is not as difficult to get rid of as bermuda grass, it is enough of a problem that I'm willing to take any volunteers who would like to pull it out of the prickly pear. In Arizona it can be found anywhere from elevations of 100 feet to 5500 feet. It has a long blooming season from April to October depending on elevation. Mine won't bloom probably till May-June time frame. Apparently it doesn't need any care, even in the rock hard soil of the outlying areas of my yard, but it does seem to like extra water.

Most of the milkweeds attract a large yellow aphids. While they may not be attractive to most eyes, the aphids are really specific to milkweeds and don't seem to bother anything else. Tarantula hawk wasps like to eat the aphids, so it all works out.

By the way—if you do grow one of the asclepias, take a close look at the flowers; they are a bit different and, if you have a good loupe, pull the flower apart and take a really close look and then check out http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milkweed

And if the economy really tanks and you are in desperate straits you can use milkweed floss as insulation. It is supposed to be better than down feathers.

Finding these plants can be difficult. Your best bet is to haunt the various botanical gardens in the state at their annual plant sales. I have seen some of them at the sales. Some people can be allergic to the sap!! Annie’s Annuals has the “Antelope Horns” variety http://www.anniesannuals.com Flagstaff Native Plant and Seed has Butterfly Weed http://www.nativeplantandseed.com or just go visit them; they are on Butler St.
Meet a Master Gardener: Janie Agyagos
by Jay Fleishman

The Master Gardener Association Speaker Bureau chairman is Janie Agyagos (pronounced Odge-uh-goosh) who joined the Association after completing the Master Gardener class in 2004.

Her professional time is spent as a wildlife biologist with the United States Forest Service, currently working at the Red Rock Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest where she has served as a district wildlife biologist since 1994. She graduated in 1993 from Arizona State University with a bachelor’s degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Management and began her career with the Forest Service in 1989 working as a firefighter on the Tonto National Forest. She has worked as a biologist on numerous Ranger Districts in Arizona since 1992.

Her main duties as a wildlife biologist include inventorying and monitoring special status plant, fish and wildlife species, designing and implementing habitat improvement projects, managing area closures for the protection of fish, wildlife and plant species and/or their habitat, conducting project effect analyses and consultations for over 50 rare species, coordinating with multiple agencies in the management of plant, fish and wildlife species and their habitat, maintaining the district herbarium, and conducting risk analyses and treatments for invasive weeds. Each of these activities is worth a lecture in itself and Janie enjoys giving presentations to civic groups and other organizations.

She and her husband Frank live on previously landscaped State land, where gardening includes maintaining the preexisting plants, including fruit trees, ornamentals, roses and vines. She augments these with annuals and perennials that are readily available through local nurseries. One of Janie’s more proud accomplishments is her herb garden, for which she constructed a rock and mortar retaining wall. Her herb garden contains oregano, rosemary, mint, thyme, salad burnet, lavender, tarragon, cilantro, dill and basil. This is her favorite garden and she often uses her fresh herbs in a variety of recipes. Her limited vegetable garden space is occupied by tomatoes, garlic, lettuce, onions, leeks and chives.

She is a member of an equine precision drill team performing charity and community services in addition to performing at parades, rodeos and other community events. Janie also races Sly, her little Arabian, in endurance races of 25 to 50 miles and has dabbled in 3-day events (show jumping, cross country jumping and dressage). And she runs with her dog several days each week.

Her interest in the Speaker’s Bureau of the Master Gardener Association stems from her speaking activities with the Forest Service, a favorite part of her work. She has given multiple presentations herself, including workshops for speakers, but now spends more time organizing, coordinating and assigning speakers for community groups. Her intense interest in giving good presentations and using her speaking skills, as well as her general knowledge of wildlife, make Janie one of our most valuable members.
We are very excited that the 2008 Arizona Highlands Garden Conference is being held in Prescott this year on Monday and Tuesday, October 13 and 14. This gives the Yavapai County Master Gardeners a chance to show off our local talent. The Steering Committee is very enthusiastic about the theme, “Water Wise – Plant Smart – For Our Future”, and the location of this year’s event, the Prescott Resort. The program they are putting together promises to bring you a host of new and interesting topics and speakers. The Sponsorship Committee has a goal of raising an additional $5,000 to meet the ambitious plans for this year’s Conference.

Sponsorship from businesses has fallen off this year because of the current economic climate. We have our speaker list complete, but some require a fee and/or travel expenses. We are, however, doing well enrolling vendors and obtaining door prizes. Fortunately several Master Gardeners have become sponsors and we are encouraged by their generous spirit.

We are asking that other Yavapai County Master Gardeners join us in helping to sponsor the Conference. A pledge of $25, $50, 75, $100 or more could put the Master Gardener Association in the category of “Grand Sponsor” ($1000 or more) which would be an unprecedented achievement. There are over 140 active Master Gardeners in Yavapai County. We will feature a full page ad in the Conference schedule with all the MG sponsor names. We’d love to include yours! Won’t you join us in making the 2008 Master Gardener’s Conference the best one ever?

Please think about an amount you could pledge and you will be featured prominently as a:
White Fir Sponsor - $25 to $99
Ponderosa Pine Sponsor - $100 to $249
Douglas Fir Sponsor - $250 to $499
Aspen Sponsor - $500 to $999
Grand Sponsor - $1,000 & Up

Please send your check made out to the “University of Arizona” to: Karen Pizzuto, U of A Yavapai County Cooperative Extension, 840 Rodeo Drive, Bldg C, Prescott, AZ 86305. Make sure to include your name, address, phone number and level of sponsorship so we can accurately acknowledge your generosity.

We’re also encouraging you to participate in another fun and unique fund-raising activity to support our conference. We will hold a Master Gardener Yard and Plant Sale on Saturday, July 12th at the Prescott Extension Office with activities taking place both inside and outside in the parking lot area. We will set up on Friday, July 11th and encourage you to donate garden tools, equipment and supplies, gardening books, plants, bulbs, rhizomes, seeds, yard art etc. for us to sell. This event will be open to all Certified and Associate Master Gardeners as well as to the general public. Look for more information via email, the newsletter, and at MGA meetings.

Thank you for your continued support! It is very much appreciated.

AHGC Sponsorship Committee,
Bob Burke, Ken Earls, Angie Mazella, Sherry Morton, Tom Watkins
Humans have concocted a toxic brew of chemicals to control a variety of insect pests, including caterpillars. While they can be extraordinarily voracious eating machines, caterpillars are also the precursor to butterflies, moths and other flying insects that may be just plain beautiful, pollinators that we need or food for other creatures. So before we spray we might want to think about those things and have another look at them. Especially another look. The EEEuugggg factor many prevail for some people but caterpillars are interesting and bizarre and as beautiful as a butterfly sometimes. So look before you spray!
University of Arizona Offers Water Testing Kits For Private Well Owners

The Master Watershed Stewards of Yavapai County and the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Offices for Yavapai County are making two types of water testing kits available as part of National Drinking Water Week May 4-10. The “basic” kit is a 5-parameter kit and it tests for pH, total alkalinity, total hardness, nitrite and nitrate and costs $8.00. The “arsenic” kit tests for arsenic and costs $24.00. If you want your kit mailed to you please fill out the order form found at the following web site: http://cals.arizona.edu/yavapai/anr/water/ and send it along with your check made payable to the University of Arizona to: U.A-Cooperative Extension-Yavapai County, Attn: Well Water Testing, 840 Rodeo Dr., Bldg C, Prescott, AZ 86305.

The kits can be purchased directly at the following two locations:

- On May 6th, 2008 from 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. and 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the meeting room of Yavapai County Extension office, 840 Rodeo Dr. #C, Prescott, Arizona.
- On May 8th, 2008 from 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. and 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the lobby of the Yavapai County Verde Annex Building, 10 South 6th Street, Cottonwood, Arizona.

These “use at home” kits are accurate and require about 30 minutes of your time. The results are not “certified” but are reliable and should provide an immediate warning to suggest further examination if necessary. With your kit(s) you will receive a list of laboratories to contact should you wish to have the results further analyzed.

Acustrip, Inc., the kit materials provider has discounted this kit for the past several years in support of this community service/ cost recovery program.

New Master Gardeners

By completing 50 volunteer hours, the following Associate Master Gardener received her certificate and nametag (signifying certification) at the April Master Gardener Meeting:

Jean Norris

Congratulations!

MGs - Please save empty seed packets and plastic pots. Seed packets will be used for an art project for the county fair and the pots are for those MGs who’d like to start plants for our July 12th plant sale. Both may be taken to the Ext Offices or MGA meetings.

MG Association News
MG Calendar

May 16-18, Home and Garden Show, Tim’s Toyota Center, Prescott Valley

May 21, Cottonwood—Social/Information Meeting with 2008 Master Gardener Class

June 14, Flagstaff Arboretum Field Trip—Sign up by calling Pattie Conrad (778-4810) in the evening

June 14, Prescott Garden Tour, 8:00 am-4:00 pm, Cost--$10

June 18, Barry Golden—“Iris”

July—No Meeting

August 16, Flower Arranging Workshop, 9-12:00 a.m., $25.00 charge—call Cynthia Cartier-Roberts to reserve your spot now--pay by July 26th, only certified Master Gardeners may attend

August 20, Cottonwood—Don Troutman—“Ponds”

September 13, Autumn Outreach Fair at Mortimer Nursery, showcases local non-profits dedicated to gardening and conservation

September 17, Prescott--Pattie Conrad—“Fall Gardening”

September 18-21--Yavapai County Fair

October 13 & 14—Arizona Highlands Garden Conference, Prescott Resort

October 26—Recognition Awards & Picnic—Verde Valley

November 19, Prescott—Elections; Panel--“The State of Organics in the Food Distribution Industry”

FROM THE EDITOR: Please send or email articles and announcements to the address below. All articles must be in my hands by the 10th of the month. Short announcements (no more than 2 or 3 lines) will be accepted until the 25th.

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Note: Change of time & place!
This meeting only!
MG Association Meeting, May 21
6:00pm, Cottonwood Public Safety Building, 199 S. 6th St. The building is just southeast and almost across the street from the Cottonwood Public Library

MG Social: to welcome the new Master Gardeners from the latest class. We’ll have introductions of the new class members, two MGA speakers talking about some interesting topics, and some great snacks and cake. The meeting is both a welcome and information meeting for the 2008 class that will have just finished. They’ll be hearing more about the Master Gardener Association and the different committees in the association so they can decide if there is a committee they would be most interested in working with.