I've always had lizards in the garden: whiptails, collared lizards, sand lizards and, my favorite, the horned lizards. We used to call them horny toads but today the name is Horned Lizards. I think they were a favorite because they were slow enough to catch. My brothers and I would frequently keep one as a “pet.” Fortunately, my dad was fairly enlightened over the issue and insisted they be let go after a day or two.

The distinctive features of the lizard are its rounded squat body and the horns that project from the back of its head. The horn configuration varies with species. The lizards range in size from 2¾ inches long to 5 inches long. Depending on the source, there are 8 to 10 species in Arizona, but horned lizards are found throughout the Sonoran desert, Mexico and Baja California, into Texas, California, and up to Washington and Montana. They show up in a variety of habitats ranging from sea level to 11,000 feet. They can be found in grasslands, spruce-fir forests and deserts.

Their diet consists of insects, making them a good resident in the garden. Some will eat many different insects, while others are more particular. One is an ant specialist. An interesting fact is that because ants are such poor nutrition, the lizard must eat a lot of them. Its stomach makes up 13% of its body mass. While the ants have powerful venom and can bite viciously, the lizards seem to be able to eat them without a problem. However they have been known to retreat from a large swarm of ants. In fact, a swarm can actually kill the lizard.

Most of the species lay their eggs between May and August. Eggs can number from 3 to 45 but usually only about 2 young lizards will survive to adult-hood. The species that inhabits higher elevations have live young. This is thought to be an adaptation to the colder weather.

While the horned lizard is slower than its cousins, the flat squat body is a lot harder for predators to eat. Its biggest protection from predators is its coloration. A horned lizard is extremely difficult to see in its native habitat. Lizards are colored to match their home. The same species may vary in color depending on where it came from. A horned lizard born in the red rocks of Sedona will
My yard is parched and yellowed. The ground is hard and cracked. What is green is limp, and lack-luster. The sun is beating down ferociously with no rain in sight. And here I am telling you to think about the winter garden. What better time, though, to be visualizing those cool nights and comfortable days, those few mornings of the year when there is frost on the ground? Lay back and take your mind away from the heat for a while. But then you have to get up and start working at that winter garden. Just don’t do it at two in the afternoon. The blessing of living in this climate is that you can garden year round. Come mid-August through September it will be time to start seeds. Check out seeds now and pick up what you might need. At some point mid-summer seeds almost disappear from the stores and mail order sources dry up. What you will be looking for are the winter vegetables; beets, cabbages, lettuces, radishes, kale, carrots, turnips, spinach and some peas. Lots of greens will like the shorter days and cooling temps. Look for short-season vegetables-those that have approximately a 60-day growing season. Most of these will resist a mild frost and are perfect for creating a new garden. Crops like radishes will mature quickly and can be used immediately. Plants like beets and turnips can winter in the garden and be used fresh out of the ground as needed. Peas will begin to grow but will slow down as the weather cools and be ready to start blooming once the weather warms in the spring.

Treat your soil the same way you would for your spring garden.

Extending the summer
None of us really wants to extend the summer but we get what we get. It’s probably going to be warm/hot through October. The good news is that there is still time to grow another crop of corn, cucumbers and beans. Look for short-season varieties. If you plant very early in August you might extend your garden’s bounty a few more months.

have a distinctive red cast while one born in the browns of a desert environment will match those colors. When threatened, the lizards have a variety of strategies to protect themselves. One of these is to play dead (which is why they were easy to catch). Another is to race away and then suddenly turn and hiss and vibrate its tail in leaf litter. But the most famous strategy is shooting blood from the eyes—a behavior made for the entertainment of kids. Some species (not all) can rupture small capillaries around the eyes and squirt a bloody solution at its attacker. It comes as a surprise and the solution can irritate the mucous membranes.

Horned lizards adopted solar technology long before humans. In cooler temperatures they will orient their flat bodies to the sun, when it’s too hot they burrow into the ground.

Horned lizards do not do well in urban environments. Some species are considered threatened because of urban growth and disturbances in their native environment. They are vulnerable to off-road vehicles and cats. If you find horned lizards in your yard, you are very lucky. Enjoy them but leave them to go about their business of eating insects.

A Winter Garden…Now??!!
by Nora Graf
The fourth annual Monsoon Madness plant sale was bigger and better than ever. Thanks to the many master gardeners who grew healthy and happy plants for the sale. We had an incredible variety of herbs, houseplants, annuals and perennials, with very little left over after the sale. The Committee even purchased about 100 plants from Mountain States to round out the xeriscape offerings. Those all sold as well. The large selection of garden pots, fencing, outdoor furniture and other miscellaneous garden art rounded out the yard sale part of Monsoon Madness.

Besides the favorite tool sharpening services we have offered in our events, this year “Garden Bites” was added. These were 15-minute presentations on transplanting, composting, perennial gardens, vermiculture, garden safety and tree diseases and pests. The talks were well attended. This rounded off the expertise we offered to the public.

Then there was the entertainment. John Mazella performed solo guitar during the early morning rush and Jeff Schalau and his wife joined their newly formed and very talented Jazz band for the rest of the sale.

Our 78 volunteer master gardeners were kept very busy answering questions about plant selection and planting their purchases. We had 704 eager customers this year.

The committee purchased more canopies to shade the volunteers and large variety of plants. This year our volunteers wore green vests to help distinguish them in the crowd.

The usual monsoon rains held off until noon so the eager “left-over “ crowd could take advantage of the half price sale. All this fun and hard work amounted to a profit of $4921 for the Association. This was part of the “better than ever” as it was $400 more than last year. We could not have done it without the hard work and support of all of 78 volunteers and committee members of the Yavapai Master Gardener’s Association.

You can see more pictures at the Master Gardener blog and on Flickr (there is a link to Flickr on the blog page.)
http://yavapaigardener.blogspot.com/
Kale
by Nora Graf

Kale is a non-heading brassica. What that means is simply that it is a leafy type of vegetable, not one that forms a head like cabbage or clusters of edible flowers. Brassica is the genus name for a range of vegetables that includes cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. Another name for kale is borecole. The name is derived from the Scottish word coles or cauliflower. These terms were used by the Greeks and Romans and referred to a group of plants. Kale seems to be more closely related to the original wild cabbage than the other brassicas. Most kale has thick stems and crisp and usually very curled leaves. There is a variety with coarser leaves that was used for cattle feed at one time. Another variety of kale is known as collard greens. There are also ornamental kales such as walking stick cabbage I wrote about in the blog and a palm tree kale.

If you are looking for a vegetable that packs a nutritional punch, kale should be the choice. It is considered the most nutritious vegetable in the world according to Wikipedia. It is high in beta-carotene, vitamin K and C and rich in calcium. It also is supposed to have anti-inflammatory compounds and anti-cancer compounds, both of which, unfortunately, are destroyed on boiling. Steaming, microwaving and stir-frying don’t seem to have the same effect.

The plant has a long history. In the 4th century BC in Greece, curly-leaved and flat-leaved varieties were grown. Until the end of the Middle Ages kale was the most common green in Europe. During World War II it was one of the vegetables the government encouraged people to grow in Victory Gardens because of its high nutritional content.

Kales are classified by leaf type. There are five main types: curly-leaved and flat-leaved, rape kale, leaf and spear, (which is a cross between curly and plain) and Cavolo nero, (otherwise known as black cabbage, Tuscan cabbage or Tuscan kale.)

While it isn’t a vegetable that seems to be readily available in markets, it would be a good culinary addition to the garden. The leaves can be frozen. In fact if the plant experiences frost it will taste sweeter and more flavorful. It has a strong flavor and can be a nice supplement to salads and stands up well to other strong ingredients like Asian style dressings. Around the globe it has found its way into the traditions of many cultures. In the Netherlands it is used in the traditional winter dishes, stamppot and boerenkool. Ireland’s colcannon is kale and mashed potatoes. For some reason colcannon is a popular Halloween dish. Special surprises are hidden in it. Who knew! It shows up in Portugal, Brazil, East Africa, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden and other countries.

A cool weather vegetable kale needs to be sown early in the spring or in the fall. You can harvest the young leaves in the fall or overwinter them for early spring growth. Plan on growing it much the same way you would grow any other brassica. Like most vegetables it likes full sun but I would think it might appreciate a bit of shade if you are planting in late summer. You might experiment with that idea. The plants may attract aphids. Wash the leaves thoroughly before using. You can start harvesting quickly. Start picking the leaves once the plant is growing well. As long as you leave the “bud” you can pick leaves as needed. It will continue to send out new ones.

Collard Varieties
Georgia: 75 days, an old standard with blue-green lightly crumpled leaves. Tolerates some heat and poor soil conditions.

Morris Heading: 52 days, huge cabbage-like plant that is slow to bolt.

Vates: 75 days, non-heading type with dark green, slick crumpled leaves. 30-inch plants that are bolt-resistant.

Kale

Chinese Kale: a small variety with dark green, smooth leaves.

Dwarf Siberian: A Russian variety that is only about 16 inches. Has slightly frilled leaves.

Dwarf Blue Curled: 60 days, 12 to 15 inches tall, blue-green, slightly curled leaves.

Lacinto: 60 to 90 days. This is an heirloom variety dating to the 18th century in Tuscany. Has an unusual blue-green leaf. Very decorative.

Russian Red: 55 days, Russian heirloom. Red frilly leaves with purple veins that are oak-shaped, tender and tasty. Dates to 1885.

Colcannon

If you are making this for a traditional Irish Halloween treat, don’t forget the treasures that need to be hidden within. A golden ring (you will marry within a year), a sixpence (you will become wealthy), a thimble (you will be a spinster), a button (you will be a bachelor).

1 lb kale
1 1/2 lb potatoes
8 Tbs. butter
1 cup finely chopped leeks
salt and pepper
½ cup finely chopped onions
½ - ¾ cup light cream, milk or a combination

Wash, trim, blanch kale. Drain, gently squeeze out water and chop finely. Set aside. Peel potatoes, boil in salted water.

Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons of the butter in a frying pan and gently stew the leeks until tender, 5-10 minutes. Add the chopped kale and sauté over high heat, stirring to evaporate excess moisture. Turn the heat to low, add 2 tablespoons of the butter and slowly cook the leeks and kale for 5 to 10 minutes longer. Season with salt and pepper to taste. In a small frying pan, brown the onions in the remaining butter.

When the potatoes are tender, drain and mash them. Whip in the kale and leek mixture and 1 teaspoon salt. Heat cream or milk and gradually beat in until mixture is smooth and creamy, yet firm. Season with salt and pepper. Reheat if necessary and mound in a hot dish. Make a depression in the center and pour the browned onions and butter in the well until they spill over the side. For a lower calorie version, simmer the leeks in milk until soft and reduce the amount of butter for cooking the onions.

Serves 4 to 6

For kale lovers there is a blog called 365 Days of Kale. http://www.365daysofkale.com/

Congratulations

The following MGs recently completed 50 hours.

Grace Baker (mentor: Carol Ekeland)

Glenna Baker (mentor: Michele Herrick)

Betsy Brouwer (mentor: Steve McIntyre)

Betsy is the first to get her hours from the 2011 class.
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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Register Now!
Arizona Highlands Garden Conference
http://cals.arizona.edu/yavapai/ahgc/

October 22, 2011,  Prescott Resort
This year’s theme is “Backyards and Beyond” providing attendees with valuable information about challenges that gardeners encounter in their own yards and their connectivity to the surrounding natural landscape.

Keynote Speakers
Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott, Washington State University’s Urban Horticulturalist, author, and lecturer will entertain and educate on horticultural myths - “Garden Myths: Practices and Products”

Dr. Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University Associate Professor of Entomology, author, and educator will share his passion for insects and practicing integrated pest management - “Gardening for Insects—Or Not’

Other speakers will cover the following topics: backyard poultry, new landscape plant introductions, irrigation, abiotic factors affecting Arizona landscapes, beneficial insects, urban wildlife, and cold hardy cacti.

Conference Registration
Early bird registration is $75 postmarked by September 23, 2011 and late registration is $100 after September 23, 2011. Continental breakfast, lunch and refreshments will be provided. Advance registration is required and no registrations will be accepted after October 13. Payment can be made by check or credit card (information and registration forms are included on the brochure linked below).

Preconference Tours
Two tours are planned for the morning of October 21. One tour will visit the Verde River headwaters near Paulden where multiple conservation efforts are under way. The other tour will tour two small farms using innovative practices in Chino Valley. Each includes lunch and costs $25 (before September 23 - $30 after September 23). Go to http://cals.arizona.edu/yavapai/ahgc/ for registration information!

For Cactus Growers....
Working with cactus in the garden is a pain in the neck. They are tough and spiny. There is a company that sells tools specifically for cactus growers. If anyone owns and has used these tools, would you be interested in writing a review or just tell me your experience with them? Their website is www.cactuspruner.com

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Kirk A. Astroth, Interim Director, Cooperative Extension, College of Agriculture Life Sciences, The University of Arizona.

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Next Meeting
August 17, 6:30pm

Meeting of August 17 features Rod and Tanya Baker who will talk about “Defensible Space Done Naturally”.

Rod and Tanya own Settler Valley Ranch, a 4000 acre “Green Ranch” in Dewey. The ranch is totally off the grid and solar operated. They also do lots of innovative things; they raise miniature Hereford cattle for beef and raise goats so they eat the grass and also prevent forest fires at the same time. Come and hear their amazing story.