Early Spring Crops
from 1998, Master Gardener Newsletter
by Nora Graf

(Nothing like being lazy in the new year by copying an article from an earlier issue, but felt it is appropriate. Planting season is nearly here. Time to start thinking about the earliest crops you can grow! Some changes were made in the article to update it.)

Isn’t it exciting, it’s planting season! For gardeners in the lower elevations, it’s time to start organizing your seeds and getting them started inside or in cold frames. With our warm summers, many of our favorite vegetables like an early start and cool temperature. As things heat up these guys give up quickly and bolt, (start the flowering process.) When this happens, most turn bitter or woody and need to be replaced with the heat-lovers.

Lettuce—One of the joys of lettuce is that there are varieties for every season; winter, spring, summer and fall. Through selective breeding they have been created to grow in a variety of conditions. (Catalogs from the Cooks Garden, Seed Savers, Bakers and Seeds of Change have a lot of great choices and information.) Watch for the best season to plant a particular variety.

Lettuce is derived from a wild plant, Lactuca serriola. This plant was a winter annual from Asia and North Africa to Northern Europe. It is thought that the Egyptians grew lettuce around 4500 BC and originally to have been grown for the seeds because the leaves were very bitter. Selection of less bitter varieties started early in lettuce’s history. The Romans introduced lettuce to Britain. It appears in a 1597 herbal book. Over time, many varieties were developed, including loose and firm-headed varieties. Color is also variable, with pale green to lime to dark green and various shades of red and brown. Lettuce is easy to grow from seed and some of the colored varieties can be tucked into flower beds and still look attractive. Seeds can be sown directly or started inside.

Broccoli is another really early garden crop. Thought to have come from the Mediterranean area in the 17th century, it spread to Italy and northern Europe. Formally called “Italian Asparagus”, it appears in a book called “Gardener’s Dictionary” in 1724. There are basically three types, known by when they mature or by being annuals or perennials. The perennial is rarely seen today. Over-wintering types can be set out in late summer, giving them time to prepare for winter.

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MG Association Meeting, Wednesday, Feb. 16 6:30pm: Meeting Site has Changed for the Verde Valley Meetings! See back page for information.

Alta Vista Gardening Club, Prescott, fourth Tuesday of the month, 12:30pm. Call 928-443-0464 for location and information.

Prescott Area Gourd Society, third Tuesday of the month, 6:30 pm, at the Smoki Museum.

Prescott Orchid Society, meets 3rd Sunday of the month, 2pm at the Prescott Library, call Cynthia for information. (928) 717-0623

Prescott Area Iris Society call 928-445-8132 for date and place information.

Verde Valley Iris Society call Janet Regner at 602-370-4836 or email her at jkregner@aol.com

Check out the new MG blog. More garden information, events and pictures.
http://yavapaigardener.blogspot.com
Cauliflower is closely related to broccoli; this is a different species of the same genus. The cultivation and growing season are similar to broccoli. Mini-varieties are now available so you don’t have to figure out what to do with 10 pounds of cauliflower.

Peas are real cool-weather lovers. At the first sign of heat most varieties shrivel up. Get them planted early. Peas have been grown for thousands of years. They can be eaten fresh, dried or the tender young leaves can also be eaten. Whether you plant edible varieties or “sweet peas” for flowers, they flourish in the cool spring or fall temperatures. Plant them directly in the ground. Pick up some legume inoculant to improve their growth. This microorganism comes in a powdered form that can be placed directly on the soil where the seed is going, or the seed can be dampened and then rolled in the inoculant. Peas do not like waterlogged soils.

Carrots were grown by the Romans. The orange varieties were developed from red types. For many years orange was the only color grown by gardeners but today an entire range of colors is available for the home gardener. Purple, red, orange, even yellow types, which are thought to be a mutant purple, can now be found in seed catalogs.

Radishes are truly amazing plants. They grow nearly everywhere; you can plant successively for a long season and the seeds will sprout without fail. This makes them a great plant for a kid’s garden. Even if they don’t like to eat them, for kids they are an almost guaranteed plant to grow well. In China and Japan they are an important part of the diet, while in European countries they are a minor salad condiment. The ancestors of modern radishes are known in many regions and it is known that Egyptians gave them to workers on the great pyramids. Black radishes (still available) were the first to be cultivated, with white radishes appearing in Europe in the late sixteenth century. Radishes can be long, like carrots, or round. Color and taste can vary. Red, white, black, plum and purple types predominate. Everything from mouth-screaming hot to nearly-sweet types are available. Throw the seeds on the ground, water and watch them grow. The fastest can mature in 20 days. Great for even a kid with a short attention span. Try a new variety this year. If you enjoy Asian food, try growing the daikon radish.

(Horseradish is a brassica and is related to radishes, broccoli, mustards and cabbages. It can be grown here but really prefers cooler more humid summers, unlike the conventional radishes.)

Cabbage has been cultivated for over 3000 years. The original wild variety was developed into what we know today, along with broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts and kohlrabi, among others. The modern cabbage seems to have originated in Germany where red and white types were grown by 1150. There are spring and summer varieties, although with our climate it seems to be best if planted early or later in the summer to mature in the fall. Start them inside for a head start and look for varieties that can handle a little heat or are said to be slow-bolting.

The early spring garden can also be filled with spinach, kohlrabi (a great tasting, if unusual looking vegetable) brussels sprouts, mesclun, kale, beets, chard, turnips, etc. etc. etc. Start planting now.
Bob Gessner was born and grew up in Elizabeth, New Jersey. His first childhood gardening memory is of a small vegetable plot next to the garage, where his dad raised tomatoes. In the summers, Bob helped his grandparents with their gardens on the eastern shore of Maryland. It was also in Maryland that Bob rescued a wild prickly pear cactus (Opuntia sp.) that had been growing on the sandy roadsides and been mangled by the road graders.

As an undergraduate, Bob majored in Environmental Science at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. At the University of Rhode Island, he earned a M.S. and Ph.D. from the Botany Department, specializing in mycology. His thesis research was on the ecology and physiology of fungi that occur on salt cordgrass, Spartina alterniflora, an important wetland species.

After graduate school, Bob spent three years on a postdoctoral fellowship doing research at the Institute of Marine Sciences at the University of North Carolina. Needing a steady job, he accepted a faculty position in the Department of Biological Sciences at Western Illinois University, teaching Introductory Microbiology, Mycology, Diseases of Trees and Shrubs, and other courses dealing with fungi and plants. In addition to teaching, Bob worked on fungal physiology, mycorrhizae, population genetics of morels and mold problems. He retired from WIU in January 2008 and soon thereafter Bob and his wife Cathy settled in Prescott.

Since the landscape around their house in Prescott was mature and needed work, it was a good opportunity to switch to new and interesting plants that did not use much water and required less care. But coming from the Midwest, it was a challenge adjusting to the cool night temperatures and windy days in the spring, low precipitation, soils with low organic matter, insect and wildlife problems and different vegetables and fruits adapted to central Arizona conditions. So in 2009, Bob decided to take the Master Gardener class as a way to learn about gardening in Arizona.

After taking the class, the Gessner’s removed the red photinias, cotoneasters, lilacs, rose of Sharon and Oregon grape in their yard and replaced them with cacti, yuccas, other succulents and native xerophytic perennials, shrubs and trees.

As a mycologist, Bob knows that mycorrhizae have been shown to have the greatest impact on plants in low-nutrient soils. Mycorrhizae are probably very important in helping plants take up phosphorous and possibly other nutrients in native xeric soils that are also low in organic matter. In Bob’s own garden, he adds organic matter and likes to use mulch.

Besides the landscape plants, the Gessner’s have a small herb garden and one artichoke plant, an idea from a Master Gardener house tour. Bob is overwintering inside a number of cold-sensitive plants (bougainvillea, mandevilla, ice plants, and various succulents) that will go back out on the patio in the late spring. For fun, he is starting seeds of Joshua tree, ocotillo, trumpet vine and calamondin orange. Always the experimenter, Bob was in New Jersey and heard a seminar on a successful way of growing figs in whiskey barrel-size pots. The presenter had over 100 different fig trees that produce crops each year. The plants are pruned after the leaves are killed by frost and overwintered in an unheated building.

Another reason Bob took the Master Gardener class was to get involved locally. He enjoys, and helps with the Monsoon Madness Plant Sale, Master Gardener helpline, Highland Center native plant sales, garden tours and plant walks with Sue Smith. He also likes the great people!

Bob’s advice for struggling gardeners who are new to the area—call the Master Gardener Helpline or come to Cooperative Extension Service office for help and information!
If you have been reading this newsletter for awhile you will probably know I am constantly urging people to try something new. Well, it's a new year but I see no reason to change. Life is an adventure, so this year's adventure can start with long beans.

Long beans are self descriptive—they are long... beans. The beans pods, depending on variety, can be 12 to 25 inches long. Long beans have been a staple of Asian cuisine—well, for a long time, centuries even. Related to ‘regular’ beans they are a different genus and are actually a variety of cowpeas. Other names include long-podded cowpea, asparagus bean, snake bean and Chinese long bean.

The plant is a climbing annual although bush varieties have been developed. Bean pods hang in pairs and should be picked immature for eating. They are native to Southeastern Asia, Thailand and Southern China in warmer subtropical and tropical areas. These are quick growers and to prevent the beans from maturing, they need to be picked every day. It doesn’t take long for the pods to over-mature.

Pods can be eaten fresh and cooked and are best eaten young. Use in stir-fries and cooked salads or cut into small sections and add to omelets. Nutritionally they are very low in calories and heavy on vitamins.

Varieties

Red Seeded Asparagus Bean, 75 days, very long (24 inches), no strings, with small seeds. Large yields on long (10 foot) vines. Resistant to heat, humidity and insects. Beans best picked when they are 12 to 14 inches long.

Chinese Mosaic Long Bean has lavender-pink-shaded pods that are 12 to 18 inches long. Crisp and flavorful.

Thai #3 Extra Long Bean has extra long beans, 30 inches or more although they should be picked for eating before they get that long. Seeds are spotted red and white.

Thai Suranree Bush Long Bean is one of the bush long beans. It works in smaller gardens. The beans are about 12 inches long and have dark reddish-maroon seeds.

Stickless Wonder is another bush, dwarf type, growing about 30 inches tall. It has 12-inch pods. It only needs 54 days from planting to first harvest—a fast grower.

Sources

Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds
www.rareseeds.com
2278 Baker Creek Road
Mansfield, MO 65704

Southern Exposure Seed Exchange
www.SouthernExposure.com
PO Box 460
Mineral, VA 23117

Glazed Chinese Long Beans
Recipe from Aaron McCargo Jr. (Food Network)

Prep Time: 5 min
Cook Time: 15 min
Serves: 4 servings

Ingredients

| 1/2 pound Chinese long beans |
| 2 tablespoons butter |
| 2 tablespoons sliced scallion |
| 1 tablespoon freshly minced ginger |
| 1 tablespoon minced garlic |
| Pinch red pepper flakes |
| 1/2 cup chicken stock |
| 1 tablespoon honey |
| 1 tablespoon sesame oil |
| Salt and freshly cracked black pepper |
| 2 tablespoons sesame seeds, optional |

Directions

In a large pot of boiling water, blanch long beans for 2 minutes until slightly tender. Allow to cool. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, add butter. Add scallions, ginger and garlic. Mix together. Add red pepper flakes and long beans. Allow to cook for a few minutes. Stir in chicken stock, honey and sesame oil. Season with salt and pepper, to taste, and add sesame seeds, if desired. Mix together.
I love old Gardening Books. They are a reminder of a different time and different lifestyle and how some things don’t change. The following is from a book published in 1911:

“Chapter III
Raising Flowers From Seeds

One of the greatest pleasures to the gardener is in raising flowers, both perennials and annuals, from seed; and especially is it interesting to gather and sow the seeds saved from her own finest plants. I always mark the plants whose seeds I wish to save by tying white strings about the stems when in full bloom as a sign to all that blossom must not be cut. My maid keeps me supplied with a box containing little pieces, about eight inches long and an inch wide, of white muslin, black cambric, pink cambric and turkey-red. Tie black upon the plants that are to cast out in the autumn; scarlet upon the very bright red phloxes; a pink and white string upon all those of pink and white varieties; and a single white piece upon the choice white phloxes, and also upon all plants whose seeds I wish to save.

The seeds, after maturing, are gathered when dry, put into boxes, each of which is carefully labeled, and then sown either in August or the following spring.

The seeds of perennials take longer to germinate than those of annuals, and often, when one has abandoned all hope of their coming up, they will at last appear. One year, some platycodons sown in my garden in August did not show signs of life until the middle of the following May; so one must be patient and give Nature her own time. When there is much rain in April and May before the seeds sown in the seed-beds have germinated, the smaller varieties are quite apt to rot in the ground, and I have lost many a crop of Canterbury bells from this cause. Seeds more often fail to come because of too wet weather after sowing or because they have been allowed to become too dry, or because they have been planted too deep, than through any fault of the seedsman’s seeds. At first, when beginning gardening, I laid upon the seedsman all the blame for any failure of the seeds to germinate, but now I know that such is rarely the case. It is either unfavorable weather conditions or carelessness on the part of the gardener. If, when the little germ is about to break through the enclosing husk, it is allowed to become dry for twenty-four hours, it will be killed; while, on the other hand, too much water at this time will also cause it to die.

Chapter V
Fertilizers and how to Apply Them, Together with some Plant Remedies

Formerly, the feeding of infants was a comparatively simple matter. They were given milk, and, after the first few months, a cereal; but today the nourishment of young children has become serious and intricate, and the food for each child is prepared according to a special prescription, moderated thus and so from “milk from the top of the bottle;” one cannot wonder if the hair of grandmothers left in charge of their children’s children becomes prematurely white in consequence.

In former times, the gardener used only manure, or if he were quite advanced in his craft, some bone meal, as stimulants for his flowers. Fertilizers, today, are as many in number as the prescriptions for infants’ foods, and, in the seedmen’s catalogues, many different varieties are listed for the various fruits, for vegetables, and for the flower garden. Not all are necessary, but some knowledge of the different requirements of the various flowers, of the food best suited to each plant with which it will achieve the best results, is one of the most interesting studies of the modern gardener.

Among our friends, there are some who cannot eat red meats, uncooked fruits, salad or other foods. The fact is accepted without comment, and the hostess provides such articles of diet for her guests as are best suited to their conditions. Why, therefore, should not the plants that reward us with such luxuriant bloom for the care bestowed upon them receive each the nourishment upon which it thrives the best?”

How Times Have Changed, or Not
from The Practical Flower Garden, by Helen Rutherford Ely, 1911
MONSOON MADNESS STARTS NOW

Start thinking about Monsoon Madness now. The fourth-annual Monsoon Madness Plant and Yard Sale will be held in July. This is the “big event” for raising funds for The Association. A large percentage of the proceeds are from plants grown by Master Gardeners. Start those perennial seeds now. Think of what favorite shrub or native can be slipped and grown for the July sale. Herbs are especially popular. Steve McIntyre, zpsteve@yahoo.com, is chair for the event.

DOUG McMILLAN’S TALK WELL RECEIVED

The Prescott MGA January meeting membership closely listened to fellow MG and consulting engineer, Doug McMillan’s talk on rainwater harvesting and aquifer recharging. Doug’s approach is unique: gather rainwater then transport it to where it will most efficiently be returned to the underlying aquifer. A brisk Q & A session followed.

MENTORS NEEDED

Mentors are needed for the 2011 MG class. If you are a certified MG, you qualify to be a mentor. Contact Tom Konzem, tkonzem_62@msn.com (underscore before 62), 776-1322.

SPEAKERS BUREAU MEETING

A Speakers Bureau meeting will be held March 5th, 10am to 12pm, Prescott Extension Office. Existing and new members welcome. Please contact Tom Watkins, qfd@aol.com, 273-1065, by March 1st if you plan to attend. The purpose of the meeting is to:

1) Review recent improvement suggestions received and develop a plan for 2011

2) Learn about the Speakers Bureau role in the communities we serve

3) Generate interest in obtaining additional members for the Speakers Bureau

ROSE PRUNING

MGs are pruning roses at Sharlot Hall Museum in Prescott on March 15th, starting at 8am. Contact Kathy MacCauley, Prescottgirl@qwest.net, 443-8934 if you can participate.

THE MEETING SPACE FOR THE COTTONWOOD MEETINGS HAS BEEN CHANGED. IT IS NOW LOCATED ON HWY 260 AT THE SUPERIOR COURT BUILDING AT THE COUNTY JUSTICE CENTER. SEE MAP ON LAST PAGE!
Master Watershed Stewards

The Oak Creek Watershed Council (OCWC) and the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension are seeking applicants for the Oak Creek Master Watershed Steward Program to become volunteers interested in knowledge about watershed issues and sharing their experience with others. Get involved with local water resources while learning how to make more informed decisions related to your own land, community and watershed. Learn about forest health and the geology of the Sedona area. Gain hands-on experience in water quality monitoring and water conservation. Discover how GPS and GIS technology are used for watershed management. This intensive 16 week, adult-oriented course will educate and train participants in all aspects of Oak Creek watershed issues. Participants will learn the basics of hydrology, climate, geology, ecology, water quality, and water management among other topics. No previous experience is required. Classes will be taught by University of Arizona faculty as well as other professionals from our area and around the state. Those who complete the course will be offered unique volunteer opportunities with the Oak Creek Watershed Council to monitor and protect the health of Oak Creek.

Classes begin Thursday, March 3, 2011, and will be held every Thursday afternoon from 1 PM to 5 PM through June 16th in Sedona. Four classes will be Saturday field trips. The cost is $95.00, which includes the Master Watershed Steward guide and all handouts, as well as field trip transportation/expenses. A maximum of 24 people will be accepted for this class. Applications are due by February 18th, 2011. For more information or to request an application, please contact:

Barry Allan
(928) 554-5460
Email: barry@oakcreekwatershed.org
Web: http://www.oakcreekwatershed.org/MWS-Course-Outline.pdf
<http://www.oakcreekwatershed.org/MWS-Course-Outline.pdf>

New Extension Office in Camp Verde

The Cottonwood Extension Office has moved to Camp Verde. The new address is 2830 N. Commonwealth. It is at the Justice Facility, and is a modular building you will pass on your way to the new Superior Court building (where our MGA meeting will be held in February).

Yavapai Gardens Subscriptions

If you’d like to receive Yavapai Gardens via U.S. Mail this year, please have your check, made out to U of A, to Karen Pizzuto in the Prescott Ext Ofc ASAP. The price is the same as last year, $21.50 for 11 issues. Cost will not be prorated for missed issues.
Please note this is a new meeting site!

Next Meeting
February 16, 6:30pm
Our speaker for February is Steve Ayers, a newspaper columnist for the Verde Independent and the Camp Verde Bugle, two local newspapers. Steve wrote a book called 'Camp Verde (Images of America)', which is a visual and written history of Camp Verde and the times before and after the formation of the fort. Steve is a compelling story teller and author - he will present a fascinating history not only of Camp Verde, but of the struggle to get produce from the Verde Valley to Jerome and Flagstaff.

From Hwy 260, turn west on Cherry Creek Road (3 miles from the I17/260 interchange). There is a traffic light at this intersection and signs that indicate Yavapai County complex. Turn right (north) onto North Commonwealth Drive.