Events & Activities

MG Association Meeting, No meeting this month. Attend the Recognition picnic and conference instead!

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. (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

Mountain View Garden Club, Prescott Valley, Dewey area, 2nd Friday of month, 1:30pm, call Sandy Lundgren 775-4993

Native Plant Society, Prescott, Highlands Center for Natural History, 1375 S. Walker Rd. 6:30pm. 2nd Thursday of the month. Attending the talk qualifies as Continuing Education. (928-776-9550)

Check out the new MG blog. More garden information, events and pictures. http://yavapaigardener.blogspot.com

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Highlands Garden Conference
Photos by John Emerson

Every three years we put on a gardening conference. This is the year. The conference gives us a great opportunity to think out of the box. It’s a time for us to learn new things, expand our horizons and maybe widen our worldview. This year's conference will hopefully do all of those things. Below is a bit of information about some of the speakers. Don’t forget about the pre-conference tours. Registration is open until October 13. Late registration rates do apply, but it’s worth it.

Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott, the first keynote speaker, has been poking holes in gardening dogma or confirming our sometimes-crazy ideas for years. Pick a subject: mulches, fertilizers, pruning; you name it she has done research to find out what really works or not scientifically. She has a several websites: her university website: (http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/~linda%20chalker-scott/Horticultural%20Myths_files/index.html) and along with a number of other horticulture professors a blog: https://sharepoint.cahnrs.wsu.edu/blogs/urbanhort/default.aspx

Her topic: “Garden Myths: Practices and Products.”

The number of garden products on the market are dizzying – which ones are good? Which are a waste of your money? And which cause more harm than good to your garden? Dr. Chalker-Scott will begin with a brief overview of how to interpret marketing claims, with a particular focus on scientific credibility. She will look at three case studies of popular gardening products and determine whether they benefit your gardens – or simply someone else’s wallet. At the end she will consider some simple, inexpensive, yet effective alternatives for a sustainable, healthy garden.

Our second keynote speaker is Dr. Whitney Cranshaw from Colorado State University where he is an Extension specialist who specializes in insects. Author of several books, he brings not only years of experience but a love for the topic. He will actually be doing two programs, the morning keynote and a session in the afternoon.

His keynote topic is: “Gardening for Insects - or Not!” The types of choices gardeners make in terms of plant selection and landscaping can have major impacts on the types of insects that will
be found in the yard and garden. Some of these insects can be considered desirable because they are attractive (e.g., butterflies), have interesting habits (e.g., hummingbird moths), are important pollinators (e.g., bees) or assist in the control of pest species. Others create problems. This discussion will consider how to manipulate garden designs to attract - or avoid - several common insects.

His session is: “Recognizing Natural Enemies of Insect Pests (Life Styles of the Swift and Vicious).” Assisting the management of all insects are various natural enemies—predators that hunt and consume pest insects, lethal parasitoids that develop internally, and pathogens. Although some of these are readily recognized by gardeners, such as lady beetles, others are less well known. Furthermore, certain life stages, such as eggs or larvae, may not be well identified. This discussion will review the most common natural enemies of garden insects, including their identification, general habits and conservation.

Other programs include:

“Drip Irrigation for the Home Gardens”
Dr. Ed Martin will be discussing the use and installation of simple drip irrigation systems for the home garden and landscape plants. He will talk about the components of the various systems, including emitters, filters, pressure regulators and the appropriate distribution system.

“Backyard Chickens”
Would you like delicious fresh eggs every day from your very own chickens? Rachel Bess will show you how easy it is to keep laying hens in your backyard year round, even in the city! Chickens make great pets, efficient bug and weed eaters and excellent soil tillers, not to mention that they provide us with wonderful fresh eggs. Learn everything you want to know about how to raise chickens in your backyard. It’s easy, fun and very rewarding!

Additional programs include:
New Plant Selections from Mountain States Nursery.
Integrated Pest Management by a representative from Arbico, a company that specializes in beneficial insects.
Abiotic Factors on Plants. What?? Most people don’t really knows what this is, but it’s all those things that affect plant growth that you don’t think about.
Zen Mocarski from Arizona Game and Fish will be talking about Urban Wildlife Issues. You can ask him what to do with large problem pests.
Gene Twaronite will talk about Native Cold-Hardy Cactus. Since Gene is from the Prescott area he knows what works best for this area.

Register now! Hope to see you there.
It's the beginning of September and I am so grateful to be talking about winter gardening chores. It's been a tough year and I am just waiting to rip this year's garden up. The first frost can't come soon enough this year. With winter, there are bulbs to be planted. Bulbs take some preparation and planning but can provide a great return on your investment in the spring.

What we call bulbs are actually several things. There are the true bulbs, corms, tubers and rhizomes. True bulbs are the daffodils, onions, lilies and tulips. These have a very short stem with fleshy leaves or scales. (Think about an onion when you cut one open.) The plant stores energy within the bulb which is used to form new roots and leaves through the winter and spring.

Corms look similar to bulbs but their energy storage system is a bit different. Gladiolus and crocus form corms.

Dahlias come from tubers, along with some begonias, potatoes and sweet potatoes. Tubers are swollen underground roots that have buds or "eyes." Each bud can produce a separate plant.

Rhizomes are very similar to tubers but are underground stems. The ginger root you use in cooking is a rhizome, along with bearded iris, cannas and asparagus.

Regardless of the type; bulbs, corms, tubers and rhizomes store energy to help the plant from season to season. (From now on when I say bulbs I mean all the other types as well.) Energy from photosynthesis, the process of converting sunlight to sugars, occurs in the leaves. Sugars are then converted to starches which are stored in the bulb. The leaves produce the energy that the bulb needs to get through the next winter.

Don't cut them back! Hide the leaves behind other plants to keep the energy in the bulb. Please resist the urge to remove the leaves if you want the plant to come back the following year. The leaves produce the energy that the bulb needs to get through the next winter. Don't cut them back! Hide the leaves behind other plants or ignore them. This is a time to sacrifice your vision of garden perfection to allow the bulbs to regenerate themselves for next year. Once the leaves are yellowed and are more dead then alive you can remove them. (For bearded irises that remain green year round, I would suggest just trimming off the dead parts. You often read to cut them back considerably in late summer, I'm of the mind that if they are green and growing there is no reason to cut them back.)

Now back to the storing energy part. No one likes the droopy leaves of bulbs that have flowered. Please resist the urge to remove the leaves if you want the plant to come back the following year. The leaves produce the energy that the bulb needs to get through the next winter. Don't cut them back! Hide the leaves behind other plants or ignore them. This is a time to sacrifice your vision of garden perfection to allow the bulbs to regenerate themselves for next year. Once the leaves are yellowed and are more dead then alive you can remove them. (For bearded irises that remain green year round, I would suggest just trimming off the dead parts. You often read to cut them back considerably in late summer, I'm of the mind that if they are green and growing there is no reason to cut them back.)

Now is the time to work on your spring garden. Have fun!
This is a dramatic plant when you get up close to it. Driving by it you might miss that, as it is just a big green plant. When in bloom this one is definitely worth a stop and look.

Milkweeds are insect magnets. Butterflies are especially fond of some of them. This particular species attracts Queen butterflies (*Danaus gilippus*) and Monarchs. They would make a good addition to a butterfly garden. On the downside, they are poisonous, so don’t you let people and pets eat them. Leave that to the butterflies.

Antelope Horns are native to Arizona. They grow throughout the state except for Yuma County. I have them growing in a wild lot a couple of blocks from my house. They are a perennial and grow in sunny, open areas. They like rocky and sandy soils.

The flowers are pale green with white and maroon. The flowers grow in large umbels (clusters). Each flower consists of 5 up-curved petals with 5 up-curved magenta and white hoods (see photograph). The fruit is a long tear-dropped shape and is slightly colored with maroon. The name antelope horns comes from the seedpod’s similarity to antelope horns. The leaves are green with fine hairs and lance shaped. Most of the plants I’ve seen have upright stems, but I’ve read they can be a bit sprawling too. If you break off a leaf or stem the plant will exude a milky sap. This milkweed can get quite large, up to 3-feet tall and almost as wide.

Milkweeds have a unique pollination system. I took a class back in my college days on plant taxonomy and was just fascinated with milkweeds. Bees, ants and wasps are the pollinators. The pollen is packed into two sacks (pollinia [singular] pollinarium [plural]). The sacks easily attach to an insect leg. The pollinia then re-orient itself as it dries. When the insect lands on another flower, the sack is deposited into a special groove, where the sack breaks down and the pollen germinates and the flower is pollinated. When you get to see the pollinia under a microscope it’s a lot more interesting than the description! For someone with a native plant garden this would be a good addition. It has a large taproot so transplanting it can be problematic, although I did read on a gardening forum that if you do it when they are small and the ground is wet, it will work. You can sow the seeds outdoors September thru October. The seeds need some cold temperatures to germinate. Once the weather warms in the spring, the seed will germinate. You can also cold-stratify the seed in your refrigerator. It needs a well-drained soil with full sun. If you want the plant to attract butterflies you can prune it back once to increase the amount of new foliage for butterfly larvae. (To do this it’s best to have several plants, prune one and let it grow first before you prune another. This assures that there is fresh foliage for a longer time.)

The plant is supposed to have medicinal properties. Native Americans made a tea from it to strengthen the heart and the Navajos used it as a treatment for rabies. However I don’t recommend you eat or drink it for any reason. It contains some of the same cardiac glycosides as digitalis. The good part is these chemicals deter deer and livestock.

Asclepias was a legendary Greek physician and the Greek god of medicine. Asperula is Latin for rough. In Greek mythology the god, Asclepios, brought Orion back to life. He was supposed to be able to bring the dead back to life.

Part of the history of milkweeds is that the silky down of the seeds was used in life jackets during World War II. The silk is 5 to 6 times more buoyant than cork.

A source of seed is Native American Seed 1-800-728-4043 http://www.seedsource.com/catalog/detail.asp?PRODUCT_ID=3068
I am in love with sycamores. I had a chance meeting with a monster specimen down in Southern Arizona last year and I had to stop and just spend time admiring it. Not a landscape tree for the small home lot, but if you have the space and right conditions for it, I’d say go for it!

This is a big tree: it can get to 80 feet high but it is a slow grower. Expect 20 feet in 20 years. Plant for the future. Its slow growth rate translates into a long life span with a surprising ability to survive drought. The tree has a very large trunk and supports a wide spreading array of branches. The trunk can get to a diameter of four feet.

The bark is whitish and thin, smooth feeling under the hand. On the older sections the bark can be gray, mottled, rough and furrowed. The bark peels in brownish flakes, giving the trunk and branches a mottled appearance.

The leaves are star-shaped and divided into 3 to 5 lobes, green on top, paler below. Sycamores bloom in the spring with male and female flowers. The flowers are tiny and the seed develops into a large ball-like cluster with hairs protruding between the nutlets. They mature in August and remain on the tree through the winter.

Sycamores prefer wet soils along streams and canyons. Chances are if you see one in the middle of nowhere without a stream in sight there is probably a spring or a depression where water collects. You will find sycamores throughout Arizona and parts of New Mexico at elevations that range from 2000 to 6000 feet.

If you would like one on your property, you can purchase one at some nurseries. Seed-grown trees sometimes lack vigor, so make sure you put it in the right place. In spite of their ability to withstand drought they will do better in coarse-textured soils that are near streams and springs. Keep in mind that the pollen can trigger allergies.

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October Plant Sales

October is a good month if you want to buy plants. It’s the season of the botanical garden sales. The are all the weekend of Oct 15-16 except for the (if you are traveling) Las Vegas show which is just the 15th.

- Desert Botanical Gardens
  Phoenix
dbg.org/plantsale
- Tohono Chul Park
  Tucson
tohonochulpark.org
- Las Vegas State Tree Nursery-
  Las Vegas
forestry.nv.gov
Halloween, Have Pumpkin?

I’m not much of a Halloween fan except for the pumpkin pie part. While jack o’lanterns can be fun I’d much rather use pumpkin for cooking. So instead of talking about the virtues of carving, I’m going to suggest using your pumpkin for something to eat.

Calabaza Guisada al Chipotle
Smoky Braised Mexican Pumpkin
from Rick Bayless’s Mexican Kitchen

Serves 4 to 6, can be served as an entree or side dish.

1 1/4 cups Essential Roasted Tomatillo-Chipotle Salsa

3 to 6 (1/4 to 1/2 ounce) stemmed, dried chipotle chiles (or canned chipotle chilies en adobo)
3 large garlic cloves, unpeeled
8 ounces (about 5 medium) tomatillos, husked and rinsed

1. For dried chiles, toast them on an ungreased griddle or skillet over medium heat, turning regularly and pressing flat with a spatula, until very aromatic, about 30 seconds. In a small bowl, cover the chiles with hot water and let rehydrate 30 minutes, stirring frequently to ensure even soaking. Drain and discard the water. (Canned chiles need only be removed from their canning sauce.)

2. While chiles are soaking, roast the unpeeled garlic on the griddle or skillet, turning occasionally, until soft (they will blacken in spots), about 15 minutes; cool and peel. Roast the tomatillos on a baking sheet 4 inches below a very hot broiler until blackened on one side, about 5 minutes, then flip and roast the other side. (For the sake of efficiency, you can roast the tomatoes from step 1 for the braising sauce while you’re roasting the tomatillos.)

3. Scrape the tomatillos (and their juices), rehydrated or canned chiles and garlic into a food processor or blender, and process to a rather fine-textured puree. Transfer to a bowl and stir in enough water (3 to 4 tablespoons) to give the salsa a medium consistency.

Braising Sauce

12 ounces (2 medium-small round or 4 to 5 plum) ripe tomatoes
1 tablespoon olive oil or rich-flavored lard
1/2 pound lean boneless pork shoulder, cut into 1/2-inch pieces (optional)
1 medium white onion, thinly sliced
1/4 cup chicken broth or water
Salt, about 1 teaspoon
Sugar, about 1/4 teaspoon
4 cups peeled, seeded and cubed (3/4-inch pieces) fresh pumpkin, preferably from a 1 1/2-pound wedge cut from a tan or green Mexican pumpkin (a 2-pound pie pumpkin will give you about the right amount, too)

1. Roast the tomatoes on a baking sheet 4 inches below a very hot broiler until blackened on one side, about 6 minutes, then flip and roast the other side. Cool, then peel and roughly chop, collecting any juices with the tomatoes.

2. In a large (10- to 12-inch) heavy skillet, heat the oil or lard over medium-high. If you’re using the cubed pork, fry it now, turning and scraping up bits of browned meat, until nicely golden all over, about 10 minutes; scrape into a small bowl, leaving behind as much oil as possible.

3. In the same skillet, fry the onion, stirring regularly, until well browned, about 10 minutes. Add the tomatillo salsa and the tomatoes to the skillet, stir for several minutes as it all thickens and reduces, then stir in the broth or water. Taste and season with salt and sugar.

4. Finishing the dish. Turn on the oven to 350°F. Place the pumpkin cubes in an ovenproof baking/serving dish just big enough to hold them in about an inch-thick layer (a 9 x 9-inch Pyrex dish works well). Mix in the browned pork if using it. Pour the sauce over everything, cover with foil or a lid and bake until the pumpkin is tender, 40 to 45 minutes.

5. Uncover, raise the oven temperature to 400°F; bake until the sauce has reduced a little and the top is crusty, about 15 minutes longer, and it’s ready to carry to the table.

Advance preparation: The braising sauce can be prepared through step 2 several days in advance; cover and refrigerate. The dish can be baked for 40 or 45 minutes, cooled and refrigerated; finish baking just before serving at 400 degrees for 15 or 20 minutes.

Variations and improvisations: You can, of course, make this dish with other pumpkins and squash: Butternut squash offers a dense texture and rich taste; hubbard is lighter with a soft texture, pie pumpkins are very good all around—use what you can get your hands on. Also, to add a green balance of flavor, stir in 1 to 1 1/2 cups of sliced chard, cleaned lamb’s quarters (quelites) or amaranth greens (quintoniles) before baking.
Last Day

Saturday, October 1, is the last day of the Verde Valley Farmers' Market

Ramada next to Ft. Verde State Park, On Hollamon Street, off of Main Street, Camp Verde, AZ.

June 11 - October 1, 2011, Saturdays, 8:00 am - 12:00 noon

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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Congratulations

The following Master Gardener has completed his 50 hours.

Rich Peterson

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Next Meeting

No meeting this month, but hope to see you at the MG Recognition Picnic and the Highlands Garden Conference.