Events & Activities
MG Association Meeting, Wednesday, March 21 6:30pm See back page.
Alta Vista Gardening Club, Prescott, fourth Tuesday, 12:30pm. Call 928-443-0464 for information.
Prescott Area Gourd Society, third Tuesday of the month, 6:30 pm, at the Smoki Museum.
Prescott Orchid Society, 3rd Sunday of the month, 2pm, 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 2nd Friday of month, 1:30pm, call 775-4993
Native Plant Society Meetings - Prescott, 6:30pm 2nd Thursday of the month. Attending the talk qualifies as Continuing Education. Non-members are welcome to attend. Highlands Center for Natural History, 1375 S. Walker Rd. (928-776-9550).

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

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Container Gardening
by Nora Graf

Container gardening is something I’d really like to do well. Now that I don’t have to “go to” work very often I might give it another try. In my experience the biggest problem is keeping plants watered during the hot summer months when you are away at work. The only time I was really successful with my containers were the years I had an irrigation system and timer for them. Most years I would get home from work and look at poor wilted plants. While they survived...sometimes...they never did well. I’m going to give it another try this year.

Just like with any plant you have to consider its cultural requirements when picking plants for a container. Container or not, your plants won’t do well if there is not enough light. Most vegetables need at least six hours of full sun. Putting them in a container doesn’t change that. So the first tip is make sure the container can be placed to give the plants the appropriate amount of light.

There are a number of different choices you can make for the container, although the two main choices are plastic or ceramic. There are other types out there, but they tend to be hard to find and more expensive. I like ceramics because they just look better, in my mind. There is something about the gorgeous glazes that set my heart thumping. Problems with ceramics include weight, water retention and longevity. The bigger the pot the heavier they are. Unglazed ceramics especially dry out faster and over time wetting and drying and accumulation of salts can break apart the pot. Plastics are much lighter and hold moisture better and look better than they used to. If you want to spend a little extra money you can get some very nice looking plastic or resin containers. If you need to move the container occasionally, a lightweight container is the way to go. Buy a container that fits the plant you want to grow. Larger is probably better for things like tomatoes and multiple annuals. Smaller would work for things like lettuce that have a smaller root system.

Containers also don’t have to come from the garden store. Be imaginative and flexible. Buckets, tubs, toilets (not recommended for the front yard, depending on the neighborhood), wheel barrows and even things like boots work as containers. It just needs to hold soil and have drainage.

Speaking of drainage, water should be able to drain from the pot to prevent root rot and salt problems. If your pots don’t have a drainage hole or a too small hole you can drill one or make a hole larger. (for ceramic pots you will need a special drill bit designed for
drilling into concrete.) If you want to use a pot without a drainage hole I would suggest finding a pot with a hole that will fit inside your decorative pot. Saucers are good for catching water if you don’t want to get water on something, but never leave the water in the saucer. You are creating a rot problem. If you don’t use saucers, use bricks or something to raise the pot above the surface of whatever you have it sitting on. You need drainage and good air circulation for a successful container garden.

Now fill the container with a growing medium. There are all kinds available or you can make your own. Whatever you decide, pick one that is appropriate for the plants. I point this out because plants like cactus and other succulents really need a different soil than plants like pansies. A good soil mix will have good drainage and retain moisture that is gradually released to the plant and raise humidity levels. Most of our native soils don’t really do these things well, so buying or mixing a soil is better than digging some from your yard. One more thing, don’t put a layer of gravel, Styrofoam peanuts, pot shards or anything “to improve drainage.” It doesn’t improve drainage, in fact it may hinder it. Just fill the pot with your soil mix, that’s all you need.

When choosing plants, pick out healthy plants. It’s nice to rescue sad bargain-bin plants, but unless you are skilled in plant rescue it’s best to start with a healthy plant. Check roots to see if they are healthy. Pick plants appropriate for the season. Do not plant summer plants too early, or plant cool-weather plants in July. Keep in mind a container is more in-tune with air-temperature than an in-ground garden. So the container will warm faster or cool quicker than anything planted in the ground. Since soil temperature affects germination and growth, keep that in mind.

Next are some suggestions on the number and types of plants you can fit in different size containers. Just like in any garden you don’t want them too crowded but you want to use the space you have effectively. If you are planting seeds, thin as recommended on the seed package.

**One-gallon container:**
- Herbs (individually)

**Five-gallon container:**
- 5 onion starts
- Beets
- Carrots
- Corn (several plants per container)
- Swiss chard, lettuces, other greens
- Herbs, two to three plants depending on their full-grown size, one plant for larger herbs like rosemary or sage.

**Fifteen-gallon container:**
- Two broccoli, tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and other larger vegetables per container. Don’t overcrowd!
- Herb garden for larger herbs

I haven’t forgotten about flowers; the same rules apply. Small single plants can go into 1-gallon containers, a couple of plants may go into a 5-gallon container and multiple larger plants can go into a 15-gallon or larger container.

Watering—the reason for the death of millions (of plants)! Too much water will rot the roots, too little and the plants will wilt and die. There is less margin for error in containers. This is why drainage holes are crucial. Try to put plants with similar watering requirements together in a container. You don’t want to mix cactus and squash. Neither will be happy and likely both will die. If you set up a drip system, make sure you flush the containers with additional water. This helps move out salts that accumulate in containers.

Because you are watering more, container plants need a lot more fertilizer. This is a case of less fertilizer more often. I would recommend fertilizing every week with ¼ to ½ the recommended dose of whatever fertilizer you use. You can use commercial fertilizer or fish emulsion or manure teas. The fish emulsions and fertilizer teas will provide micronutrients that a commercial fertilizer may not—check the label.

Like most plants that are grown outside, containers are subject to all the pests that show up in your yard. They can be controlled by sprays of water, soapy water, insecticidal soaps and Bt. The same rules apply—read the label and only apply in accordance with the instructions on the label. With containers it is easier to cover your plants with a row cover to prevent plant damage from insects and other pests like those birds who may like your lettuce as much as you do. Row covers are a less expensive (they can be used for many years) and less toxic solution to some pest problems. Maybe not always attractive, but if the cover is secured around the pot you can repel a number of pests.
Growing fruit trees is fraught with pain and suffering. Everything wants to bore into them, eat them, just gnaw on them and then there is the weather. Too hot, too cold, too much of either at the wrong time. They can be a symbol of heartbreak in any garden. I have known the heartbreak and pain of growing fruit trees.

I am going to talk about what happens when the tree is healthy but you are not getting the fruit you expect, even longed for. There are a variety of reasons for fruit trees to grow but not produce fruit. A disclaimer before I start: some may be out of your control. A note: this information also applies to most of the nut trees that we can grow also.

Once you have the tree planted, impatience sometimes takes over. It takes awhile for a tree to go from the tiny sapling to actually producing fruit. The plant can produce fruit when it starts to flower but chances are that it won’t start producing reliably for several years. Each type is a bit different but below is a table of what to expect for the common fruit trees grown in this area. If your tree is young, just continue good cultural practices and have patience; it may be just a matter of time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit Tree</th>
<th>Years to Expect to Produce</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>2 to 5 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apricot</td>
<td>2 to 5 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sour Cherries</td>
<td>3 to 5 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Cherries</td>
<td>4 to 7 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figs</td>
<td>2 to 3 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peach</td>
<td>2 to 4 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pear</td>
<td>4 to 6 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plum</td>
<td>3 to 6 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quince</td>
<td>5 to 6 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apple and plums need a second pollinator. Some peaches, nectarines and apricots need a pollinator, some do not. You need to check the varieties.

Sour Cherries can produce on their own; sweet cherries need a pollinator.

Anjou and Bartlett pears are self-fruitful but may benefit from a pollinator while other varieties of pear do need a pollinator.

Plums need a pollinator.

Make sure if you are buying two different varieties that they blossom at the same time. It doesn’t pay to plant a peach tree that blooms at the beginning of March along with one that blooms at the end of March, for example.

Some trees, like apples, produce biennially which means if you have a good crop one year the next year will be a lot smaller. A heavy crop of fruit limits the flower/bud formation for next year. The only way to get around to this is to thin the fruit.

Prune the trees every year. Fruit trees really benefit from pruning.

Weather and climate affect fruit production. Fruit trees need a certain amount of cold weather to produce fruit. If you buy trees locally you will (should) have a tree adapted to our area. If you bought a tree from New York and had it shipped out, it may grow, but it may never get the number of chill hours it needs to fruit here. Even buying locally may not solve the problem as our winters seem to be getting warmer, but certainly the wrong tree choice will leave you with a pretty shade tree and no fruit.

One of the key problems of fruit production in our area is the weather. We are afflicted with late frosts and, these days, early warming. In warmer weather trees start to bloom too early. When the weather turns cold the blossoms/fruit are killed. Peach trees in particular are susceptible to this cycle. It’s one of the reasons that your tree may not produce more than once every five years.
USDA Plant Hardiness Map

The USDA has recently issued a new plant hardiness map. Their website has a good interactive map available.

For those that need to know now, here is your zone.

Camp Verde: Zone 8b, 15 to 20°F
Sedona: Zone 8b, 15 to 20°F
Prescott Valley: Zone 7b, 5 to 10°F
Prescott: Zone 7b, 5 to 10°F
Cordes Lake: Zone 8b, 15 to 20°F
Ashfork: Zone 7b, 5 to 10°F

There is some controversy about this map. No surprise there, but it should be used as a guideline, not a hard and fast rule, to help you plant your garden. Keep in mind this is not the same as the Sunset zones. There is a new 2012 version of the Sunset Western Garden Book available in the bookstores.

Gardening Events

The National Heirloom Exposition
September 11, 12, 13, 2012
Sonoma County Fairgrounds
Santa Rosa, California
www.theheirloomexpo.com
(707)773-1336
75 food, farm and garden speakers

Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company
Annual Spring Planting Festival
May 6-7
Mansfield, Missouri
www.rareseeds.com/spring-planting-festival

The Mother Earth News Fairs
June 2-3—Puyallup Fairgrounds, 10 miles east of Tacoma, Washington.
September 21-23, Seven Springs Resort in Seven Springs, Pennsylvania
www.motherearthnews.com/fair

Seed Savers Exchange Conference and Campout
July 20-22
Decorah, Iowa
www.seed savers.org

Comstock Ferre & Company
201st Anniversary Celebration
June 3
Wethersfield, Connecticut
www.comstockferre.com/200years

or so. One of the reasons you don’t see many peach trees grown here is the problem of late frosts in our area. Those halcyon days of picking up cases of Oak Creek peaches ended when the peach trees (not long-lived trees anyway) were not replaced because they produced poorly. Oak Creek and the Sedona area are now known for their apples, but they once produced some of the finest peaches known to man but the trees weren’t reliable producers. Open flowers on most fruit trees cannot tolerate temperatures below 27°F. You can try to protect a tree from a late frost by covering it if the tree isn’t too big.

Finally the health of the tree is crucial. Trees that are struggling to survive are less likely to fruit. If the tree is weak and diseased it may produce no fruit. Keep an eye out for problems. Everything from fruit tree borers, to fungus to heaven knows what can impact the health of the tree. If your tree is mature and is not fruiting give it a good health check. Look for evidence of disease and insects. Treat appropriately if you find a problem and perhaps next year you will have fruit.
Now that I have told the story about one of the plant explorers (February 2012) that a species of penstemons was named after it’s time to talk a little bit about the plants themselves. They are one of the greatest plants ever you can have in your garden, at least in my opinion.

Not only are penstemons beautiful but many are native to Arizona. They make a great addition to any garden whether it is a traditional flower garden or in a xeriscape-low water garden. The plants themselves aren’t spectacular. Generally, they form a very low rosette of long narrow leaves close to the ground. From the rosette tall flowering spikes arise.

The plant prefers full sun or light shade. Light shade underneath a paloverde or mesquite, not the light shade you might find under fruit trees or something similar, just to point out they like more sun not less. If the flowering stalks are floppy they have too much shade. They really, really need well-drained soil. Root rot is a serious problem for them. Occasional watering is all they really need in the summer, none in the winter. Penstemon are short-lived perennials but easily reseed so one plant can turn into many. You can use the stalks as cut flowers, but water the plant the night before cutting. Another bonus is that penstemons are loved by hummingbirds.

Some species to try:

**Penstemon ambiguous**

One of my absolute favorites. It is an unbelievable plant. While most penstemons form a rosette of leaves and tall flowering stalks this penstemon is different. Also called Bush Penstemon this species forms a shrub-like, semi-woody mound that grows to three feet tall and 3 feet wide. It blooms profusely over several months usually May through September. It freezes back in the winter in Camp Verde but respouts in the spring. In colder areas you might have to protect it. It is found in areas 4500 to 6000 feet, which covers most of the County, so should do well in your yard. Like all penstemons it needs very good drainage and will rot quickly if over watered. I had three of these plants at Fort Verde State Park and they were magnificent. This is one of those plants that I swoon over. Unfortunately, they seem to be extremely hard to find. The ones I planted at Fort Verde came from Mountain States Nursery. Native Plants in Flagstaff has carried them occasionally. If you can find them somewhere I really recommend them for low-water gardener.

**Penstemon baccharifolius**

The Rock Penstemon is another shrub-like penstemon. This plant forms a small clump about 2 feet tall and wide. The dark green foliage looks good year round. Starting in spring it begins to send up short spikes of rose-red flowers just on the tips of the stalks. It continues to flower till fall. It really needs good drainage and don’t overwater. Because it stays green year round, it would add to any garden. It will take some shade. It is a fast grower and doesn’t need much care except for some pruning in late winter after flowering.
Penstemon parryi, Desert Penstemon or Parry's Beardtongue

If you have been to a botanical garden in Arizona or a nursery that carries low water plants you have seen this penstemon. It is the one you will most likely see in cultivation. It is often used in reseeding areas of highway construction. It is easy to grow and it is beautiful. It has very tall spikes of hot-pink flowers that go on and on blooming in early spring. The plant, native to southern Arizona and into northern Mexico and is found at elevations ranging from 2000-6000 feet. Don’t overwater. It reseeds easily.

Penstemon palmeri

Named after the plant explorer, Edward Palmer (February 2012) Palmer’s Penstemon is one for colder elevations; it is comfortable between 4000 and 8000 feet. You’ve probably seen it around Prescott along roadsides. It has exceptionally tall flower stalks four to six feet tall. The flowers are very large and fragrant and a light pink in color.

Penstemon superbus

Superb is the right word for this penstemon. Its six foot spikes are covered with coral flowers. It is a real stunner and should be grown as much as possible. It naturally occurs at elevations of 3500-5500 feet, preferring rocky canyons and washes in Arizona, New Mexico and northern Mexico. It is an easy growing plant and again minimal watering is imperative and it reseeds easily.

Penstemon pseudospectabilis, Canyon penstemon, desert beardtongue

Three-foot spikes of rose-purple flowers grace this plant in the spring. It naturally grows in canyons and washes in the southwest US. It grows from elevations 2000 to 6000 feet. The plant is shrubby, forming a thick stand of spikes.

Penstemon eatoni, Firecracker penstemon

This plant lives up to its name with bright red flowers that are more cylindrical and narrower than other penstemons. It sends up stalks about three feet tall. The stems tend to sprawl a bit so you can either stake them as they grow or simply provide them enough room.

There are hundreds of penstemon species, these are just a few that grow in Arizona. They really belong in your garden!
Congratulations

for completing 50 hours of service

Lois Janowski
Judee Moreno
Pam Raess

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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FAX: (928) 445-6593

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(928) 554-8999
MG Desk (928) 554-8992

MG Opportunities

Mentors Needed
We need mentors for 2012 class members who live in Prescott, Dewey, Sedona, and the Verde Valley. Contact Betty Loos, bettyloos1@gmail.com, 284-3355.

No e-mail Access?
If you do not have e-mail or internet access and would like a copy of the MGA calendar for the year and/or a copy of the MGA Directory, contact Cathy Michener, 541-9341.

Farmers Markets
We still need chairs for the Master Gardener information tables at the Sedona and Camp Verde Farmers Mkts. The Sedona market is at Relics Restaurant on Friday mornings June/July, and near the creek at Tlaquepaque on Friday mornings Aug/Sep. Contact Mary Barnes, mcbarn1@cableone.net, 583-0889.

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.

The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation in its programs and activities.
Next Meeting: March 21, 6:30, Cottonwood

Richard Sidy, M. Ed., President of Gardens for Humanity, "Building Garden Communities -- decentralizing and diversifying food production and gardens"

Cottonwood Recreation Center
150 S. 6th St.
Cottonwood, AZ