Events & Activities

MG Association Meeting, Wednesday, Aug. 21, 6:30pm, Prescott. See last page.

Alta Vista Gardening Club, Prescott, fourth Tuesday of the month, 12:30pm. Call 928-458-9508 for information.

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

Prescott Orchid Society, 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.

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

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

The Verde Thumbs Garden Club, Cottonwood 2nd Tuesday, 6:30 pm at The Seventh Day Adventist Church. (928) 634-7172

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Winterfat (White sage)
Krauscheninnikovia lanata (former name: Ceratoides lanata)
by Nora Graf

Winterfat, an evergreen shrub, is a member of the amaranth family. It is low-growing and long-lived. Fluffy seed heads cover the plant from September to December making for a dramatic appearance in the landscape.

It likes chaparral, semidesert grasslands and pinyon juniper areas in elevations from 2500 to 8000 feet. It is native in much of western North America, from the western United States and central western Canada and into northern Mexico. Winterfat thrives in salty soils and is often found in alkali flats. The stems are upright, although it can get lanky and droopy if given too much water. Generally the plants maximum size is three feet by three feet.

Leaves are a gray/bluish green and lance-shaped with woolly white hairs, which turn reddish as they age. The flowers are inconspicuous and bloom March to June. Flowers are single-sexed with the pollen-producing, staminate, flowers at the top with the seed, pistillate flowers below. The fruit develops with white silky hairs that aid with wind dispersal. The seedheads can be used in dried arrangements.

This is a very long-lived, plant (up to 120 years). It can be used in home landscapes and certainly pops out in a winter landscape. After buying one for my yard to see how well it would do, someone recommended that for pollination it would be helpful to have more than one. Maybe one of these days….. Since it can get a bit lanky and unattractive, I’ve found that pruning it back late winter/early spring keeps it looking better. I cut mine back heavily and remove any dead wood.

It has even survived years of assault by the Bermuda grass although this past year it seems to struggle more than usual. Probably
Wild Gourds
by Nora Graf

Cucurbita foetidissima

Having a certain interest in gourds I think this is a fun plant to have, but there are barriers for some people, among them the less-than-pleasant-smelling leaves. But you get used to it after awhile! People sometimes call these buffalo gourds. The plant has evolved to live in semi-arid areas and is found in the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. Unlike the gourds I use for my artwork these gourds are perennials with huge taproots. The taproot has been studied for its yields of oil, proteins and carbohydrates and its potential as a biofuel. They are often found on road-sides and in dry sandy areas. Also, unlike cultivated gourds, they have a yellow flower more like squash vs. the white flowers of the cultivated types. The flowers open early in the day. Flowering is from May to August producing very round small four-inch green with white, striped gourds. As the gourd matures and dries it turns yellow. The leaves are gray green in color triangular and heart-shaped leaves. The vines can grow to 20 feet.

While the fruit can be eaten, you might want to wait until you are really hungry or the fruit is really young. It gets fibrous and bitter and somewhat poisonous as it matures. The seeds look similar to cucumber seeds and one source said they were edible. Cattle and wildlife will eat it.

In the past, parts of the plants were used for medicinal purposes. Powdered seeds and flowers mixed with saliva were used to reduce swellings and the dried root mixed with cold water was drunk as a laxative. The Dakota and Omaha-Ponca Indians thought it had special healing powers. The roots also have saponins that can be used as soap.

one of the reasons for its long-life and persistence against the Bermuda is that it has a long taproot up to 23 feet. (Yes, that is what the article said!) Lateral roots branch from the taproot, along with a fibrous root system closer to the surface. It likes nutrient-poor soils and is good for erosion control. It is a favorite food plant for wildlife, including elk, mule deer, bighorn sheep and jackrabbits. Cattle also like it so take that into consideration before planting. It also attracts bees, butterflies and birds.

It likes cooler nights to thrive and hates acid soils. Probably not a good idea to mulch this plant and don’t amend your native soil. It can get by easily on rainfall most of the time but giving it a bit of water every two to three weeks would probably keep it looking good. Hardiness is to -40°F.

Plants are available but you can make softwood cuttings to make more plants. Seed preparation and propagation can be difficult. The fluffy white hair and bracts make cleaning the seed difficult, and getting it to germinate is another problem. Unless it already grows nearby it may not work if you just throw the seed out on the ground. There are temperature requirements and other things to do that may be a stumbling block to growing from seed.

Native Americans used the plant medicinally for a number of ailments including making a poultice of the ground root to treat burns.

You might be wondering about the name. It is named after the 18th century Russian botanist and explorer of Siberia and Kamchatka, Stepan Krasheninnikov.
This wild gourd is also known as the coyote gourd. It is easy to tell the two wild gourds apart. Coyote gourds have dark green, light-veined leaves that are palmate (think hand-palm) with usually five points. The plant has rough stiff hairs on the stems and leaves. It has a tuberous root system.

The flowers are yellow and open at night. They produce round three to four inch fruit that range from bright yellow to dark green with white stripes. Flowering continues from April to September. Like they did with the buffalo gourd, native people made soap with it. It is said to repel lice. Don’t try to eat the whole gourd; one source described it as distasteful. Some wildlife do eat the seeds and which are high in protein and cooking oil.

It is found from southern California, southern Nevada, western Arizona, northern Baja California and Sonora, Mexico.

Calochortus is from the Greek “kalos” which means beautiful and “Chortos” which means grass. Mariposa is Spanish for butterfly. These have to be the most beautiful flowers ever. Well, maybe not ever, but when you first see one, your heart should at least go pitter-patter because it is stunning. In Arizona there are a several species.

They are all perennials and grow from bulbs. Each spring they send up a set of undistinguished-looking grayish green narrow leaves. It can be mistaken for a grass. From this comes a stem on which the flowers develop. The plant will bloom in March or April if they have received enough rain in the winter. It grows to about 16 inches tall. The flowers are up to 3 inches across and have three fan-shaped petals with a black or purple base.

Don’t try to eat the whole gourd; one source described it as distasteful. Some wildlife do eat the seeds and which are high in protein and cooking oil.

Calochortus kennedyi
This plant can have orange or yellow flowers. Each stem may have up to eight flowers per stem. The yellow-flowered ones are listed as a subspecies in some sources (C. kennedyi munzii). This species is found from California through Nevada, Arizona, the Big Bend area of Texas and in northern Mexico.

Calochortus ambiguus
Doubting Mariposa Lily
This lily can be easily found in the Camp Verde area if you are lucky to be there during its blooming season. While not as spectacular as the orange and yellow ones, its white flowers are so elegant-looking that you don’t need the splash of color. The color can vary from white to pink to bluish-gray. It is often found in grassy areas and can be easily mistaken for grass. It likes rocky open dry slopes, chaparral and open pine forests at 3000 to 8000 feet.
Calochortus nuttalli
Sego Lily
Like C. ambiguus the C. nuttalli has white flowers, although the color can vary from white to lilac to yellow. In 1911 it became the state flower of Utah. During Utah’s plague of crickets between 1840 and 1851 pioneers ate the bulbs of the plant.

Blue Grama
Bouteloua gracilis
by Nora Graf

What a wonderful name “Blue Grama” for an interesting native grass. The seedheads are like small flags hanging from the stems. It is found in Arizona and many other arid areas of the United States. It is considered a bunchgrass (grasses that grow in a clump-like fashion).

As a warm-season grass it goes dormant in the winter. Even though it is winter-dormant, it is as interesting in the winter as in summer. This is a grass you can use in your landscape. During the summer it provides the green color we seem to crave. During the winter the seed heads can be left on for a spot of fun in an otherwise drab garden. It is extremely drought tolerant and is often used for erosion control projects and roadside plantings. The best time to plant is the summer monsoon season.

It grows to a height of six to twelve inches but the root system can grow as deep as six feet which is what helps it be so drought tolerant. The blue in the common name should give you a clue that the leaves are grayish in color.

It is the state grass of Colorado and New Mexico. Surprisingly, it is considered an endangered species in Illinois. It grows in many parts of Arizona from elevations of 1000 to 5000 feet.

Calochortus aureus
Golden mariposa
The common name, says it all. This species has spectacular yellow flowers. It is found in dry, sandy, red clay soils from elevations of 1200 to 2000 feet.

Calochortus are protected species in Arizona and while it can be tempting, do not pick the flowers or try to collect the plant. There are nurseries that grow Calochortus, so check with them if you would like to try growing one of these beautiful plants.
Canyon Grape

*Vitis arizonica*

by Nora Graf

If you have been in any of Arizona’s riparian canyons there is a chance you have seen the Canyon grape. It is the North American species of wild grape and can be found in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, southern Utah and northern Mexico. It can be found at elevations from 2000 to 7000 feet. It needs sandy, moist but well-drained sites with minimal shade. Grapes can withstand some drought conditions.

Like all grapes, it is a vining plant and in some circumstances can cover entire trees and is considered somewhat invasive. The tiny greenish white flowers bloom from April to July. They are followed from July to September by clusters of small purple grapes. The tiny grapes are edible and you can eat them raw or make jellies or juice out of them but you might have to fight off the wildlife. They are also a favorite of birds and some mammals. Songbirds like to use the plant as a nesting site.

I found some references of using the fruit to make wine but all seemed more hopeful than reality. Canyon grape was used to identify the region for resistance to Pierce’s disease in the plant’s DNA, which has been used to create improved wine grapes.

Arizona is home to some monumental trees. Measurements are for the circumference. Some are not surprising; you expect them to be big but I find it amazing that there is a manzanita (*Arctostaphylos pringlei*) that is 3 feet (37 inches) and a gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*) that is 18.25 feet (219 inches). Amazing things, plants. Give them enough time and the right conditions they can surpass all expectations. Here’s a short listing of some of them.

Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*) 504 inches (42 feet)

Alligator Juniper (*Juniperus deppeana*) 328 inches (25.66 feet)

Canyon Maple (*Acer grandidentatum*) 139 inches (11 ft 7 in)

Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*) 160 inches (13 feet)

Arizona Cypress (*Cupressus arizonica*) 240 inches (20 feet)

Oleander (*Nerium oleander*) 55 inches (5 feet)

Jumping Cholla (*Opuntia fulgida*) 32 inches (slightly less than 3 ft.) I want to know who risked life and limb to measure it!)
Monsoon Madness

The event lived up to its name, it rained! In spite of that it was another successful event. Thanks to all the volunteers that helped. Hope everyone has dried out!
**MG News**

**Highlands Center Plant Sale – MG Information Table**  
Master Gardeners will staff an information table at the Highlands Center Native Plant sale on Sept 7th. Four volunteers are needed, 2 volunteers per shift and two shifts (shift one from 7:30-11 and shift two from 11-2:30). Of course, someone is welcome to do 2 shifts in a row. At least one person per shift will be a certified Master Gardener. Contact Carole Jolly, carolejollyfun@gmail.com

**Sharlot Hall Museum**  
Volunteers are needed to help with the grounds upkeep at the Sharlot Hall Museum in Prescott. Contact Kathy MacCauley, prescottgirl@quest.net

**Camp Verde Helpdesk**  
Volunteers are needed to help staff the Camp Verde Master Gardener Helpdesk. Contact Faul Vogel, f.vogel@commspeed.net

**Searching the MG Newsletter on the Extension Website**

Trying to find something in the back issues of Yavapai Gardens has always been difficult. There is a partial index available. Steve Moody has figured out a way to do it and it works better than the U of AZ’s CALS search engine.

**Go to:** http://www.arizona.edu/search/google

In the search window type in: “Yavapai Gardens” (including the quotes) and the topic you are looking for. For example:

“Yavapai Gardens” tomato blight

The search engine retrieves all the issues with tomato blight information.

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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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Next Meeting

August 21, Prescott, 6:30pm
Speaker: Rose Kern
Microclimates