Events & Activities

MG Association Meeting, Wednesday. No meeting this month because of the recognition picnic and the conference.

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, 6:30 pm, at Yavapai Title, 1235 E. Gurley.

Prescott Orchid Society, 4th Sunday of the month, 1 pm 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

Table of Contents

Wasps . . . 1
Baby Vegetables . . . 3
Ants . . . 5
MG Events . . . 6
MG News . . . 7

My house has always been a magnet for wasps. For years I simply lived with them but over time they were building nests in areas that could be dangerous. Lately I have had someone working on my roof who is allergic to wasp stings so they had to go. The reason to keep them around is that they are great predators of other insects. I had always included them in my pest control plans for the garden. Well, that might be a bit formal, my pest control plan was just to let happen what happened.

There are several wasp species in Arizona, all of which can sting and all of which are great predators.

Mud Daubers (various species)
These are common throughout the desert areas. They be identified by their very narrow waists and long extended abdomen. They frequently like to build mud nests around houses, under the eaves, in grills, on walls, etc. This can be scary for people and if they build a nest in an area that is close to human activity it is probably best to get rid of them. On the plus side they are ferocious predators of spiders. Black widows, orb spiders and jumping spiders are frequent victims. The spiders are paralyzed and placed in a chamber with a wasp egg to provide food for young wasps. Up to 20 spiders have been found in a cell. The good news is they are fairly docile wasps and generally don’t sting unless handled. If you need to remove the nest, do it at night when the adults are gone.

Yellow Jackets (Vespula germanica and Vespula vulgaris)
Yellow jackets are mostly found in higher elevation areas, over 4000 feet. These are very social animals and form large colonies that can have up to 4000-5000 individuals. The nests can have between 10,000 to 15,000 cells. Fortunately, most you find will be smaller. Colonies are annual; they do not overwinter...
well. The only survivors are the queens which hibernate over the winter.

Yellow jackets are aggressive and are frequently found at picnics sitting on soda cans and eating the hamburgers and hotdogs. The wasps feed on any meat source, including dead animals and other insects. They also feed on some plant nectars, and serve as a minor pollinator. Yellow jackets will defend their nests. One of the worst things you can do is start flailing your arms around. Remain calm and quietly move away from the nest or food source. Swatting at them can annoy them and cause the wasps to pursue you like Africanized bees. Even if they land on you, remain calm and don’t start throwing your arms around.

**Bald Faced Hornets (Dilicho vespula maculate)**

Not to get too particular but these are actually members of the yellow jacket family and not actually hornets—but I guess if you have them hanging around your house it doesn’t matter. Unlike yellow jackets they have white faces and black bodies. These insects form the large football shaped nests often seen in cartoons. They are made of paper and have been known to get as large as three feet long. The nests are generally abandoned every winter with only the queen surviving by hibernating. They are very defensive of their nest so if you see one, back away quietly. They can sting multiple times and chase you over long distances.

**Digger Wasps (Sphex)**

There are many different species of digger wasps. They get their names because they excavate their nest-tunnels in bare soil. They hunt crickets and other insects which they sting to paralyze, lay their eggs and then the larvae feed on the paralyzed insect. They rarely sting people. The rock star of the digger wasps is the Great golden digger wasp. It has gold hairs on its head and reddish orange legs and partially reddish orange on the body.

**Tarantula Hawks (Pepsis Formosa, Pepsis thisbe)**

I see these frequently in the Camp Verde area but they aren’t really anything to worry about except for the fact that if they do sting you it is going to be very painful, one of the most painful stings of any insect. The stinger itself is about a third of an inch long. They tend to be very docile and will not sting unless seriously provoked. They are named Tarantula Hawks in part because of their size—they are very large—but also because their primary purpose in life is to find a tarantula so they can lay their eggs. The males do not hunt tarantulas but do feed on flowers from mesquite trees, soapberry trees and milkweeds. The males stage themselves in high bushes waiting for females. In Arizona numbers of the wasps have been seen gathering in mulberry trees.

**Velvet Ants (Mutillidae)**

Not an ant but a wasp with wingless females that look like ants. They are larger than ants and normally have bright red, yellow, silver or gold strips of velvety hairs on their black bodies. These wasps are solitary and feed on nectar. You may see them during the day but they are primarily nocturnal. There are 400 species in southwestern deserts. The females raid bee and wasp ground nests, paralyze the owner and then lay their eggs on the carcass. They are not aggressive but if you step on one be prepared for an extremely painful sting.

**Controlling wasps**

There are traps for yellow jackets but the best way to remove the problem is to deal with the nest. There are insecticides that are specific for wasps. The cans have a powerful spray so you can stand quite a distance away (a good idea) and still reach the nest. The best time to spray is late evening or very early morning when the adults are not flying about but are on the nest. The insecticide is quite powerful and will kill adults and any maturing insects in the nest. This is not an organic solution but because you are targeting such a small area the insecticide doesn’t harm other insects usually. Read the instructions and information on the can. If you have a serious problem this is best way to deal with it quickly and effectively. There are also bait station insecticides available. Wasps will feed on the bait and then carry the insecticide back to the nest.

If you don’t know where the nest is there are lure traps which can draw wasps away from your living area. If you find a wasp in your house, try a fly swatter.
Do you love the baby vegetables you now find in fine restaurants and in some of the local food markets? You can grow your own but there are tricks to getting the best-tasting ones. First thing is don’t expect to find that just picking big vegetables at a younger smaller stage is going to work. Sometimes that works, sometimes not. In some cases you will need to find varieties that have been created to mature at a small size. Large vegetables picked small just haven’t had time to develop the flavor we expect from them, but smaller varieties reach their full flavor at a small size.

**Carrots**—Baby carrots can be planted much closer together than regular carrots. After sprouting, just thin the carrots to 1/2 inch across. Try Parmex; it is a small round carrot that is very sweet. Another is Thumbelina which is the size of a golf ball at full maturity. Lady Finger (Little Finger) is a slender variety that is only 5 inches long when ready to pick. Another favorite is Primo. It is a bit larger but very tasty.

**Beets**—Here’s a case of a full-sized plant that can be picked while small. Detroit Dark Red, Chioggia and Formanova are common large beets that make fine baby vegetables. Some of the truly baby vegetable varieties include Baby Spinel, Scarlet Supreme, Little Ball and Action. Like carrots, space about 1/2 inch apart.

**Radishes**—They are small to begin with, but there are some baby varieties for you to try. 18-Day and D’Avignon are good choices. The key to having tender radishes is to make sure you keep them watered.

**Beans**—Some varieties of pole beans can be harvested small, like Emerite and Annelino, but the best baby beans are haricot vert varieties, also known as filet beans. Varieties like Astrelle and Marbel, Coco Nain Blanc and Precoce are nice small varieties to try.

**Lettuce**—Lettuce comes in a huge variety of wondrous colors, shapes, sizes and types. Most can be picked at any stage. Just start picking the leaves when they get 3 to 4 inches tall.

**Squash**—The patty-pan variety, Sunburst, can be picked when they are as small as a quarter or 50-cent piece. Most of the summer squash varieties are best picked small. Try Condor, Butterstick and Ronde de Nice.

**Eggplant**—Some varieties will taste good picked young, including Ichiban, a Japanese variety that can be picked when it gets about 4 inches long. Little Fingers was bred to be small and picked at 3 inches. There is also a variety called Bambino.

**Potatoes**—It’s hard to imagine homegrown potatoes are so good if you have spent a lifetime buying them in a grocery store. In this case you can harvest young potatoes but fingerling potatoes would be the way to go. Swedish Peanut, German Finger, Russian Banana and Rose Finn Apple are possibilities.

**Broccoli and Cauliflower**—The key to small broccoli and cauliflower is to plant them very close together, on 8 inch centers instead of 18. The heads will then be small, 3 to 4 inches across, so you can grow more plants in a smaller area. Snow Crown cauliflower would be a good variety to try.

**Onions and other Alliums**—For onions the best variety is Borettana Cipollini. This is a pretty rosy-bronze variety and very sweet. Another choice could be Crystal Wax. Baby leeks can also be grown. Try Broad London, King Richard, Titan and Albinstar. Garlic can be harvested in 45 days after planting in warmer areas. This is before the plant starts to bulb and they look a lot like green onions.

**Chinese cabbage or Pac (or Pak) Choi**—This is one of my favorite vegetables. Like many things it isn’t designed for a single meal unless you have a family of six. There is a wonderful baby variety that is perfect for single servings-Mei Qing Choi. The plant is 4 to 6 inches tall. Space them very close together. Pick them when they are small but if you leave them to grow they will get large.

**Peas**—The petit pois are considered one of the most flavorful peas around. Try Waverex or Petit Provencal. Pick
just as the pods begin to fill out. If you wait too long the peas become tough and starchy. Mostly when I grow peas, they get eaten right off the vine as soon as possible. They don’t have time to get starchy!

Corn—Yes there is baby corn. I’ve even grown it and it is tasty. While many regular varieties can be picked early, try Early Sunglow. You do need to plant it very close together and pick as soon as you feel a little bulge inside the husk, about 5 days after the silks appear. I have to say that you don’t get much in a small patch but still it was fun to try. Another variety to try is a popcorn variety called Japanese White Hullless. If you don’t get around to picking it right away then you can have popcorn.

Some of these varieties will be tough to find so you might have to do a bit of searching but I did find a few sources.

Botanical Interests
They have a small vegetable collection.
Customer Service: 877-821-4340

Thompson & Morgan
They are in England but I have bought from them in the past and it was very easy.
http://search.thompson-morgan.com/seeds/Mini%20Vegetable%20Seeds
Poplar Lane
Ipswich
Suffolk IP8 3BU

Jungle Seeds & Gardens
Another English company but they do ship to the US and they have a lot of choices for baby vegetables.
http://www.jungleseeds.com/SeedShop/BabyVeg.htm
PO Box 45,
Watlington SPDO,
Oxon OX49 5YR
Phone: 01491 614765
Fax: 01491 612034

Pesky ants have ruined many a picnic and forever made life miserable for gardeners. To make things worse (maybe) Arizona is blessed with more species than any other state, as Arizona is the link between several biotic regions. One report said there are 8 subfamilies, 43 genera and 318 native species. They range from the highest to lowest elevations, tundra to low desert. In Arizona it’s hard to find anyplace without ants. Besides the natives there are 12 species that have been introduced in Arizona through a variety of means, most which are found in agricultural and urban areas.

Ants are fairly easy to identify. They are clearly divided into three parts; the head, the thorax and the gaster and they are social animals so if you find one you should find many. The colonies may have up to a few queens with lots of workers that are all females. The queens stay deep in the nest while the workers are the ones you see foraging. Flying ants are mostly males, with a few female queens. The males are generally larger than the workers. Once they fly, the males do not live very long. Once mated the queen breaks off her wings and never flies again. The queens are one of the longest-lived insects known.

Most ants live in the soil but there are species that live in wood. Carpenter ants do not eat the wood they just create tunnels in it. Other species may live inside plants, including acorns, twigs and galls.

Lots of things eat ants. They are a favorite of not only lizards and toads, but also spiders, other insects, other ants, birds and bats also eat them.

Ants can be divided into several categories:

Seed harvesters (or desert fire ants) are shiny black or red ants that are common in yards and can give you a nasty sting. There are many species that fit into this category. They are related to the dreaded South American fire ants that you often hear about. The South American fire ant species have not made inroads into Arizona yet although there have been some reports of nests which have been contained. They have infested the area from Florida to Texas and have become a serious pest. Seed harvesters form colonies that include tens of thousands of individuals which, on average, only live a month.

Between lizards, birds, dehydration and other hazards they have a short life. You may have seen the winged reproductive forms of both males and queens, flying. After mating, the males die and the queens go off to start their own colonies. The queens may live up to 20 years. The younger ants work at tending new batches of eggs and as they get older they become the foragers. One way to identify seed foragers is that the workers will completely clear an area outside the nest. They form conspicuous bare-soil
circles. The ants prefer the seeds of grasses and annual plants.

**Slave-maker ants** have sickle blade jaws which are good for killing other ants and stealing their babies. The jaws make it difficult to feed their own young, which seems to be an evolutionary misstep but they have developed a strategy for survival. The newly mated queen of the species rushes a nest of another species of ants. If she isn’t killed in the process she will kill their queen and rub herself in the scent of the dead queen. The workers accept her and then tend her eggs and larvae. These become mature slave-maker workers that raid other colonies. They kill adult ants and bring home the eggs and young to supply slaves to the now slave-maker colony.

**Army ants** attack other ant nests to eat them. Interestingly, the ones in the Phoenix area are nearly blind. Tens of thousands form raiding columns during the night and eat whatever they come across. They do not form a permanent nest but move from place to place to find food. They use temporary shelters, like rodent holes.

**Honey pot ants** are edible. They have a group of workers that become the depositaries of a honey-like substance that causes them to swell into berry-sized spheres. Workers forage for plant juices and other food and then feed a sweet liquid to a specialized group of ants called repletes. The repletes can hold up to eight times their body weight in honey. They can barely move at that point and simply hang from the ceilings of their tunnels. The honey is used when outside food is scarce. The honey is flavored by what they eat. If fed apples the honey will taste of apples. They are a food source for human cultures around the world. One way to recognize them on the surface is that they have an erratic “stop and go” movement.

**Leaf-cutter ants (or fungus-growing ants)** are related to the larger leaf-cutting ants of tropical America. They are common in the Sonoran desert. The ants collect leaves and plant material to insert into fungus masses that they grow deep underground. The fungus is completely dependent on the ants and it is the only source of solid food for the ants. You can find long columns of ants moving across the desert, especially in the fall and spring or on cool summer mornings. The rest of the time they spend underground. When a new colony is formed they carry a piece of fungus with them to start their own “garden.”

I can already read people’s minds; they are wondering what the best way to get rid of ants. First, though, a little about the good they do. They are one of the most important predators of small invertebrates, including other insects. So they might be killing some terrible pest. They are one of the earth’s most important herbivores, doing more than grazing mammals. They are an important disperser of seeds. They turn over and aerate soil as much or more than earthworms.

Breaking News on Ants: A 25 year study by researcher Ronald Dorn of Arizona State University, found that ants are “one of the most powerful biological agents of mineral decay yet observed. It may be that an understanding of the geobiology of ant-mineral interactions might offer a line of research on how to “geoengineer accelerated CO2 consumption by Ca-Mg silicates.” Published online July 14, 2014

Now the bad side of ants. Who likes getting stung by an ant! In the case of fire ants it could be deadly. Carpenter ants can get into the framing of buildings and cause tremendous damage. Ants can inhabit our kitchens, pantries and any pet food sitting around. Some ants can cause damage to crops. If they aren’t a problem just leave them alone. If you have a problem with ants there are some measures you can take. If they are in your house, try and exclude them. Seal up holes and caulk seams, although considering their small size this could be a difficult task. If you are trying to exclude ants, make sure you wash the areas they are in to remove their scent trails. If you feel you have to use toxic chemicals, remember it doesn’t do much good to kill the ants that you see. Do not use a spray. While you are doing that the queen is still producing more and more eggs. To solve the problem the queen needs to be killed. Baits offer the best solutions although they have limitations. Baits are poisons so make sure you read the directions carefully and purchase the product that works best for your situation. Finally, use according to the label directions. The product will be most effective if it is used correctly and it is your responsibility to use the product correctly.
Little kids seem to love digging in the dirt. So do Master Gardeners. Combine the two and you have Master Gardeners digging in the dirt at the Head Start Preschool in Prescott.

The "Kids Garden" at the Head Start Campus on Rodeo Drive, just up the road from UA Extension Office, was started by Adam Smith as a Eagle Scout project in May. The scouts' efforts produced five sizeable garden plots, fencing and an irrigation system. The garden is nicely located in full view from the playground.

What to plant in the new garden? Ask a Master Gardener. Scholly Ketcher jumped at the opportunity to oversee the cultivation and planting and volunteered to work with the kids on their garden. Three year olds may not plant a very straight line of sunflowers, but just watch their eyes light up when that first one comes up and blooms!

Master Gardeners Susan Crutcher, Connie Loving, Kathy MacCauley, Kris Holt, and Mary Barnes met with Scholly at the garden on a warm August day to turn the soil, pull weeds and generally get it ready for the first real planting, that is, planted by the kids.

Sherry Howard was instrumental in providing the seeds. Sherry heads up a volunteer program that collects seed from fellow MG seed savers and from commercial outlets including Fry's Food Stores and True Value Hardware. The seeds, both flower and vegetable, are part of the on-going Master Gardener Public Outreach Program. MG seed-saving volunteers collect the seeds, then package and label them with descriptions and planting instructions. The seed packets are given away at the Farmers' Markets, information events and at various speaking engagements. The free seeds always lead to conversations with the public and an opportunity for MGs to explain what we do. New seed saving volunteers are always welcome.

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**Cornville Farmers Market**
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.

Nora Graf
PO Box 3652
Camp Verde, AZ  86322
mesquite2@hotmail.com
(928) 567-6703

Jeff Schalau
County Director, Yavapai County Extension Agent,
Agriculture & Natural Resources
email: jschalau@cals.arizona.edu

By-laws Change Proposed

In compliance with the minimum 30-day notification of a by-laws change, a proposed change to Article V was announced at the September 17 MGA meeting. An e-mail will be sent in early November with the proposed change, and the opportunity to submit an electronic vote; ballots will also be available at the November 19 MGA meeting.
Next Meeting

No meeting this month, enjoy the picnic and the conference.