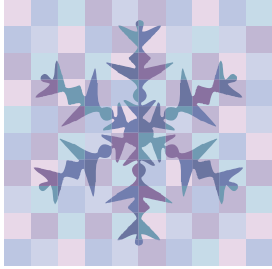


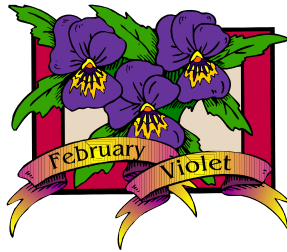
Roots & Shoots



Master Gardener
Society
of Oakland County



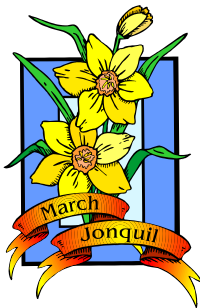
February / March 2009



February 10, 2009 @ 6:30pm
MGSOOC General Society Meeting & Location
Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church
5631 North Adams Rd, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304

Speaker : Janet Schenk–Education: “Pruning”

A business meeting will take place, prior to the start of our Educational Program.



March 3, 2009 @ 6:30pm
MGSOOC General Society Meeting & Location
Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church
5631 North Adams Rd, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304

Speaker : Don LaFond–Education: “Rock Gardens”

A business meeting will take place, prior to the start of our Educational Program.



April 7, 2009 @ 6:30pm
MGSOOC General Society Meeting & Location
Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church
5631 North Adams Rd, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304

Speaker : Bob McGowan –Education: “Plant-A-Row Food Banks”

A business meeting will take place, prior to the start of our Educational Program.

Carol's Corner



Thanks to all of you who got your 2008 recertification hours in by December 31st. If you did not complete your volunteer or educational hours for 2008, tack those hours onto your 2009 hours to catch yourself up.

As you know, this is the time of year when volunteer opportunities are few and far between. If you are yearning to get some hours in this winter, remember that we give "Required Hours" for any teaching you do in a classroom setting or to organized groups like garden clubs, libraries, etc. This includes your preparation time for working on your presentations.

As I write this we've just had our 1st winter MGV Training Class. We have 65 participants and all seem eager to learn and volunteer!

For those of you who bring food to the Master Gardener Society meetings, you can take one hour for whatever it is you're making (no matter how long it took you to make it) and you can also submit the educational hour for the presentation.

Save the date: The Banquet will be held on May 28 at White Lake Oaks Country Club. Look for the invitation in the Oakland Gardener in April. If you are a member of the Winter 2008 class and haven't submitted the hours you need to achieve your Basic Certification make sure you get them in by April 1 so you'll be on the recognition list.

The Continuing Education Committee has been hard at work coming up with an interesting schedule of classes for 2009. Class descriptions and registration material will be posted a month or two before each class.

Using Decay to Enhance Fertility (Composting 101) March 28 from 9:00-noon

Leaf casting on July 14 1:00pm-3:00pm, and another class on July 21 6:00pm-9:00pm.

Seed saving on August 13 from 6:30pm-8:30pm

Herbs on October 10 from 9:00am-4:00pm

Spring is just around the corner though as I write this they are predicting up to 10 inches of snow over night. What a winter this has been so far. On the bright side remember that a blanket of snow is very good for our perennial plantings!

Announcing Major Changes for the Master Gardener Society of Oakland County

The MGSOOC announces very important changes in venue and meeting dates for 2009. Please be sure to keep the following information for future reference.

In order to better accommodate our members, we are pleased to announce that our meetings for the coming year will be held at the Fellowship Hall of **Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church** located at **5631 North Adams Road** in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. We have outgrown the space at the Extension Office and Bowers Farm. We have had a few meetings this year at this new location and have been very pleased with the facility. It is “just around the corner and down the street” from Bowers Farm and the site for the Holiday Potluck, December 9th, 2008.

The change in venue does have a consequence in that meetings will be held on the **first Tuesday of the month** except for the months of **February, May and December**. For those months the meetings will be held on the second Tuesday. The meeting time will not change and continues to be 6:30 p.m. We had hoped to only change location and not the day of the meeting but the facility is booked on Wednesdays. We hope that this does not adversely affect anyone’s attendance.

MGSOOC MEETING SCHEDULE FOR 2009

January 6	July 7
February 10*	August 4
March 3	September 8
April 7	October 6
May 12*	November 3
June 9	December 8*

***Denotes Second Tuesday of the month**

CREATING YOUR WINTER GARDEN

Michael Saint from the Good Earth Landscape Institute in Clarkston gave a timely talk on the winter garden for our January membership meeting. Many people think of the garden as dead and uninteresting in the winter, but if you think about what you see from indoors, it can be quite beautiful. When designing for viewing (especially in winter), think about the foreground close to the house, the middle area and the horizon. Plants can be seen as snow collectors that make patterns. Layering from the upper canopy down to perennials and grasses makes the view more pleasing to the eye, especially with snow on each layer.

Plants that are special for winter viewing are yellow and red twig dogwood, viburnums (especially American cranberry), false ashleaf spirea and vines like trumpet vine, climbing hydrangea, autumn sweet clematis, wisteria and especially hop vine with its big flower heads and clinging leaves. Small plants like Russian sage and sedum look like little dust mops in the snow. Grasses can be arresting all year round and are good snow collectors. Of particular interest are Ravenna, maiden grass and Dallas blue switchgrass.

In the winter, the bones of the garden are exposed, and statuary and other decorations stand out. Furniture can be used as a prop, and fake Christmas trees collect the snow beautifully and fill in spaces where other plants have died down.

We should plan our gardens with the needs of wildlife in mind. Having lots of different species of plants attract more bees and butterflies in summer. Large perennials like coneflowers have seeds for the birds all winter long. Trees, especially conifers that keep their needles in the winter, provide shelter for the birds. And of course, a winter garden just must have bird feeders.

—Submitted by Jean Gramlich



Cabin Fever!

It was just about this time last year in January that I was tired of the snow, tired of the gloomy days and tired of being all cooped up for the winter. I was ready for something to lighten my spirits and get me believing that there **would** be an end to all of this. So I bundled myself up and hit the only place that I could think of that would brighten my day... and that was the local garden center.

Now there are a lot of very nice garden centers around, but the one closest to me to get my spring “fix” was English Gardens. So off I went. After ambling around for an hour or more, and taking in all of the colorful, indoor plant varieties, I happened onto some fliers that were advertising an orchid festival in the coming weeks. Since I knew nothing about orchids, I figured that the free presentations would certainly enlighten me and would also give me an opportunity to get out of the house!

A few weeks later, when I attended the lectures and demonstrations at English Gardens, I was amazed at how many people were in attendance...probably poor souls like me that just needed to get out of the house. Little did I know that most of those people were avid orchid growers and were there to learn about new varieties of orchids and new growing techniques. Actually, there were very few of us that were “new” to orchid growing, and so this really made me sit up and listen! I was relieved that they provided a handout which went along with the lectures, as I needed to take copious notes on the two topics of growing and repotting orchids for my own knowledge.

Now all of you out there that are ardent orchid enthusiasts will probably chuckle at this general information that I thought was so interesting about orchids. For example, the reason why orchids are so expensive is that the orchid cultivation takes up to three years to grow from a seed to a tiny plant, and **that** is just the beginning! Some of the orchid varieties that you purchase in the garden centers are seven and eight years old! No wonder you have to dig deeper into your pockets to purchase these jewels, but they sure are worth it!

Some other little tidbits that peaked my interest about orchids were 1) never use a cutting tool on leaves as they can produce a fungus, however, it is OK to use the tool on the stem, 2) if something seems wrong with the plant, look for general symptoms such as leaf tips turning brown which may indicate over-watering or too much light, 3) orchids like to be potted in tighter places, hence small pots, and when repotting, the soil should be sprinkled around the roots, not compressed, as the roots need air to grow, 4) to fertilize orchids during their active growing season from April – September, use a water-soluble fertilizer of 20-20-20 once a week, and 4) proper watering is the most important key to having a healthy orchid plant. Only the roots should be watered, not the crown, and the amount of water given to the potted plant is basically judged by its weight! Can you imagine that? You lift it...if the pot is light, you water it, if it is heavy you leave it be. How simple is that?

Other points I learned about watering orchids were to use lukewarm water (not cold!) and flush the plant for 30 seconds. This helps to rinse out the fertilization salt, aerate the roots, and wash

out the fungus in the root zone. Finally, when watering, it is fine to use tap water (iron won't hurt the plant and calcium (hard water) is actually good for it), but **do not** use water from a water softener, as the water contains salt which will draw out the H₂O from the root system. So soft water is fine to use for your showers but not for your orchids!

Well, I left English Gardens with my head spinning in all this new information on orchid growing, but I wasn't quite confident, yet, in purchasing and caring for an orchid...**not** in February, anyway. However, it wasn't long after that that I heard about an organization called the Michigan Orchid Society (MOS) which was having an orchid show in March. How perfect! Now, I could further investigate the world of orchids in the confines of a warm, and inviting university center.

Wow! I was overwhelmed by the orchid show. There were more orchids than I could ever imagine! All colors, shapes and sizes were displayed in attractive settings. No touching!! But you really could get up-and-close to those beauties and take pictures. Their structures were so intriguing from the Paphiopedilum (Slipper Orchid) with its cup-like flower, to the Cattleya (Corsage Orchid) with its full-bodied bloom, to the Miltonia (Pansy Orchid) with its delicate, smaller flowers. Every floral display was more interesting than the last. What I found interesting to do, was to find those orchids that had won first place in the show in their category. What magnificent specimens of tropical flora they were! "Warmed" my heart!

I spent most of my day there, talking with growers and listening to lectures about various orchid-types and characteristics. There were definitely, plenty of orchids to purchase, however, just like on a restaurant menu with too many items to choose, it got pretty overwhelming. As I was about to leave, the time for raffling off many orchids for door prizes was about to begin, so I hurriedly bought some tickets and anxiously waited for my name to be called. (Now **this** would be an easy way for me to choose an orchid to take home. It would be chosen by someone else!)

They were down to the last orchid and a beautiful Paphiopedilum was the final prize. I waited holding my breath as many others were, and....BINGO!...I was not chosen! That lovely plant was going out the door, but not in **my** hands! Oh, well, I did walk out of the door with some beautiful photographs of orchids, and even one of the Paphiopedilum. As I got into my car with the cold wind whipping at my face, I had to smile because **spring** was right around the corner, and my cabin fever would long be gone!!



If you are interested in learning more about orchids, English Gardens will be having their Introduction to Orchids lectures and demonstrations on February 7th and 14th and the Michigan Orchid Society will be having their 55th Annual Palm Sunday Orchid Show on April 4th and 5th. Hope to see you there to welcome in spring!!

—Submitted by Sandra Debicki

CONIFER SPECIES VS. HYBRID / CULTIVARS

*Opinions on Collecting Conifers and Exotics
by members of Conifer Obsession Groups*

The following opinions on collecting come from a series of on-line posts made by members of the CONIFER OBSESSION'S Conifer Hobbyist and Conifer Forum. The discussion starts with a Forum member from Sweden who says that he thinks plant collectors can be divided into two groups: those who collect only the species form of a plant and those who collect hybrids/cultivars. He speculates that the species collectors don't like hybrids because they are man-made and uninteresting. On the other hand, species are often uncommon in cultivation because they grow too large and lack interesting features such as the variegated foliage or blue forms found in hybrids/cultivars. He makes the point that cultivars are mostly pure, but extreme, forms of the species. He admits to liking plants from both groups and considers a nice hybrid/cultivar to be like a piece of art.

Another conifer hobbyist, who collects miniature and dwarf conifer cultivars, is interested in species conifers but as a way of tracing and contrasting the parentage of his plants. He acknowledges that some cultivars have come into existence through chemical/radioactive or other artificial manipulation of the plant by nurserymen. But he still considers these to be "natural". One of the conifers in his Michigan garden is a cultivar, *Pinus heldreichii* 'Schmidtii' which is the result of cultivation of a variant found in the wild. He is grateful to the conifer nurserymen throughout the world who search out variants and propagate them for distribution. To him, having an exact genetic copy of an otherwise unobtainable cultivar by a method such as grafting is science at its best.

A Forum member from Michigan, Siegrid Stern, who is also a collector of Exotics (bromeliads, orchids and jungle cacti), says she refrains from collecting hybrids because hybrids are not of much value to collectors in the Exotic plant world. Hybrids are unusual, and an expensive, highly sought-after novelty when they are first introduced. When they become widely available, they are less desirable. Species are disappearing at an alarming rate due to the endless destruction of their habitat and can be difficult to collect because of their diminishing numbers. Exotics collectors prefer species because they are trying to preserve them for future generations. And once they have a species in their collections, most collectors and growers of Exotics do not part with it. In addition to species preservation, they keep their plants for use as hybridization stock. As an example, this collector has been on a waiting list for a particular bromeliad for 10 years.

But when it comes to conifers, her view is a bit different. Her two acres of property are planted in *Picea pungens* and *Picea abies* with deciduous trees providing a solid green belt behind the blue conifers. Several years ago, an ice storm damaged many trees and Mother Nature gave her the opportunity to have a completely new landscape. Instead of replanting completely with species, she chose to create a colorful and easy-to-maintain landscape using both species and hybrids. She will choose a species over a hybrid if one is available but she buys what fits a particular planting area, concentrating on texture,

color, shape and year-round interest. She likes to "push the zone" and prove that a particular plant can be grown in Michigan, like she did with her cacti garden-the only one in Michigan with ten different *Cholla* and *Opuntia* cacti native to western states.

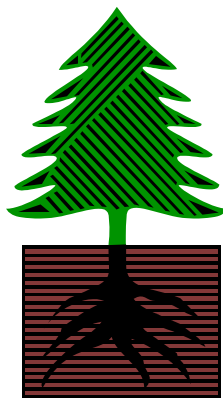
A professional nurseryman from Tennessee, Peach Grove Nursery, has a personal collection containing both species and hybrids/cultivars. Before he adds to his collection, he asks four questions: 1) Do I like it? 2) Do I have it? 3) Do I know what it is? 4) Can I use it as a stock plant in the future? Although some collect only species as a way of getting the widest range of diversity into a collection, he sees no reason to exclude hybrids and cultivars. Many named cultivars originated from wild-selected seed. And a lot of hybrids occur naturally or from unintentional pollination so not all are man-made. Some man-made hybrids have been crossed to extend hardiness on a species for commercial production; this allows one to have a plant that they might not be able get without hybridization.

He doesn't have a problem with choosing a cultivar over a species because cloning a plant for desired characteristics does not exclude that plant from being a member of the species. In addition to hybrids and cultivars, natural variation can occur within a species. For example, Colorado spruce occurs both as a blue form (*Picea pungens* var. *glauca*) and a green form (*Picea pungens*) in the wild. Each form comes true from seed but there is a wide range of color in seed-grown plants. So if you decide that you want a Colorado spruce that's a particular blue color, you would want to go with a cloned cultivar. His philosophy is that one person's collection method is as valid as another's. There are unique limiting factors in building a collection which determines which style of collection is best for a person. He has seen a collection made up of several hundred cultivars within one species and a collection of several hundred species. Both styles of collecting were equally impressive.

What's your style?

Written by Denny Gross; Reprinted with permission.

—Submitted by Siegrid Stern



Organic Gardening Notes

MYCORRHIZAE AND SOIL CARBON

A study summarized in the January 2009 issue of *Acres USA* reported on the effect of mycorrhizal inoculation on levels of soil carbon. (Don't panic, I'll explain what this means shortly.) Tall fescue grass was grown in pots with and without mycorrhizal inoculation, and then the level of carbon in the soil was determined. Soil carbon was about 75% higher in the inoculated pots, and there was a positive correlation between the degree of inoculation and the level of carbon in the soil in the pots. Now what does all this mean?

Mycorrhizae

Mycorrhizae are fungi that live in a mutually beneficial relationship with most plant. They are in the form of fine threads that attach themselves to plants' roots. "Mycor" means fungus, and "rhizae" means roots. This way they expand a plant's root area many times and so enable the plant to absorb more groundwater and – therefore – more mineral nutrients. In return mycorrhizae take sugars from the plant – fungi are incapable of making sugars because they can't perform photosynthesis. Most plants are dependent on mycorrhizae for healthy growth, and some depend on them for their very survival.

Inoculation

Mycorrhizae can be purchased at many garden stores. Mycorrhizal species are usually specialists, only partnering with specific plant species or families. So mixtures of different mycorrhizal species are sold, designed for a particular group of plants, such as lawns, vegetables, and so on. Inoculation is achieved by soaking seed in a mycorrhizal solution or by applying mycorrhizae directly to the surface of the soil after seeds have been sown.

There is some debate as to the effectiveness of mycorrhizal inoculation in improving plant growth. Some say there is no effect at all; others say there is. My guess is that in degraded soil there would be an effect. For example, where trees are planted in disused farmland where trees had not grown for many years, the necessary tree species-specific mycorrhizae would almost certainly be absent, and their addition would be beneficial. On the other hand a garden with rich organic soil where vegetables have been grown for years might well have adequate populations of all the appropriate mycorrhizal species, and – therefore – adding more could be ineffective. Note that I have chosen the word "organic" above. Application of fungicides, which would kill off mycorrhizae, isn't acceptable in organic gardening.

A final point that's relevant to the need for inoculation, which I only recently became aware of. The mustard family does not employ (if employ is the right word) mycorrhizae, in fact plants in this family are antagonistic and kill them. The mustard family includes broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, cress, kale, radishes, turnips, and rutabaga. Any vegetable grower will grow some or all of these. As you rotate your crops, the vegetables that follow a bed of cabbages, for example, will

have fewer mycorrhizae at their service, so here is a case for inoculation. I haven't noticed a problem with crops following cabbages, etc. in the rotation, but I shall be looking closer this year.

Mycorrhizae and Increased Soil Carbon

In 1996 Sara Wright, an agricultural research scientist, discovered a substance she named "glomalin". It consists of 30% to 40% carbon and represents up to 30% of the carbon in the soil. It's relatively stable in the soil and, consequently, contributes importantly to the formation of humus. Glomalin is only produced by endo-mycorrhizal fungi, that is to say that group of mycorrhizal species that attach themselves to the outside of plant roots – the very ones that are being discussed here. These fungi belong to the "Glomus" group, which is the origin of the name glomalin. In the case of perennials, such as our native American grasses, the alternation of seasons causes their roots to lengthen and then retract, shedding glomalin as they die off. For me this explains the great deposits of humus in our prairie soils. I had always associated humus formation with forests, but of course humus in prairie soils is no less abundant.

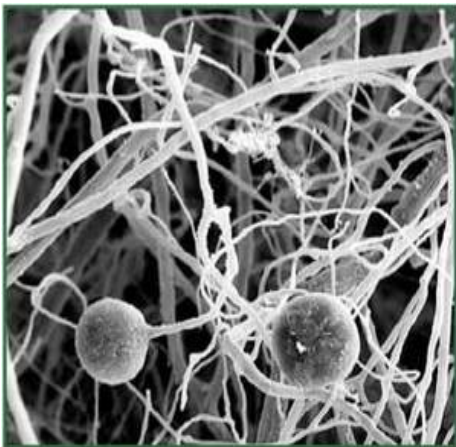
Why Soil Carbon Matters

The history of agriculture is a story of the continuing loss of soil carbon. Agricultural soils contain 50% to 75% less carbon than the virgin soils they came from. Soil carbon performs many useful functions for growers, but two are important to this discussion: carbon absorbs and retains rainwater, and carbon is where soil microbes live. Groundwater and soil microbes are both essential for soil fertility so that to restore soil carbon is to restore the natural fertility of the soil.

References

Building Soil Organic Matter Biologically – The Benefits of Mycorrhizal Soil Inoculation by Mike Amaranthus, Jeff Anderson, Zack Amaranthus, and Dave Parry, in *Acres USA*, January 2009

Soil Life and Carbon – Answers to Global Warming in Our 'Root Cellar' by Mike Amaranthus, in *Acres USA*, March 2008



Mycorrhizal threads

—Submitted by Peter Bray

Compost Treasures

A treasure is something of great value or worth. What could be found in a rotting compost heap to lay claim to such pride and joy? Well, over the year my compost receives offerings from the kitchen a couple of times a week. The offerings are scraps, peels, trimmings, and seeds from our favorite foods. (Otherwise they wouldn't be in our kitchen!). It's kind of a "Green Thing". Why throw it to a landfill when it can be used to fulfill your land? So a neat bucket sits on the counter to collect these scraps. My compost pile begins in the early summer with bags of leaves collected the previous fall. Then a cutting or two of lawn grass is added, along with the kitchen scraps. Warm weather allows maintenance like turning and watering, which breaks down the leaves quickly. The late summer finds over ripe garden plants which go to compost. These will sometimes have numerous seed heads, and that's ok. Also, the trimmings from produce you harvest like large cabbage leaves, turnip and carrot tops, and expired green bean plants can be added. Why fill the garbage cans?

Winter is still a good time to add, just keep a path open in the snow, to get to your compost. Coffee grounds, egg shells and kitchen scraps keep adding to the pile.

The "Treasures" come as the compost thaws. Sprouts begin to pop up, some recognizable as tomato plants, but who knows what kind. Lots of large leaf squash or pumpkin, but the variety is unknown. Did I throw in a rotten potato? Looks like it!

A few years ago, my compost offered a dozen or more baby lettuce plants, which I gently took out and placed in the garden. It was the earliest fresh salad material we had ever had. Another year, squash vines took over. I let them be, just to see what would happen. That fall, I harvested 12 acorn squash that we ate during the winter. Another year it was 5 spaghetti squash. A tomato plant offered tons of cherry sized tomatoes the next year. So each year, I now permit something to remain. The suspense is thrilling, waiting for the fruit to form so the plant can be identified.

The first compost pile will be left to support the volunteers that have sprouted, and a new pile will be started. Leaves, wood chips and grass clippings will be layered, and kitchen scraps will again be added for another season. Pile #1 will surrender its "Treasures", be turned and covered for the winter, awaiting its final use as enrichment for spring planting. Pile #2 will now collect the peels, trimmings and seeds, and hopefully produce yet another "Compost Treasure" for next year.

—Submitted by Diane Opria

Notes from Nutcase Nursery

There is still great opportunity for reflection even though the “resolution” month has passed. And just because January may have already disappeared, there really is no statute of limitations on making decisions to improve ourselves or our environment.

Every year I check my garden diary for notes I’ve made as reminders. Of course I’m much more religious checking them in the off season because I’m too busy in the on season. That sets me up for missing them altogether because when I do discover a needy note, it many times is not the right time to do the work. But how many times can I fire myself for being a lousy administrative assistant?

Two things I never forget are the February seed sale and the hunt for miniature roses. I long for these events so much I don’t need a written reminder.

It’s often said that the rose is Michigan’s most expensive annual, but the minis are tough little fairy plants. Years back, I discovered that mini roses are one of the most popular plants for sale in February because of Valentine’s Day. You can find them at the grocery, drugstore, X-Mart, almost anywhere plants are sold. And most stores that stock them just for gift-giving have no way to give them the care they need to keep them alive for any length of time. Once they become orphans and start to look a little iffy, they go on sale. I once purchased fourteen of them for twenty-five cents a piece but I had to convince the manager that they would be better off with me than in the trash as well as fish them out of a garbage can. I saved almost \$100 worth of plants from premature compost. Last year’s floral foray was almost as rewarding. Walking into the foyer at the grocery store I found a large selection of minis marked 50% off. By the time I made it to the register, they were 75% off. I carted off six the first night and the remaining three the next day. I was absolutely giddy.

Saving the little darlings is not an easy task in the middle of winter, however. But that’s where the miracle of the light table comes in. Timing is everything. First, I need to convince the plants that spent their winter lolling in the high light to find new homes. Then I have to very carefully time my seed-starting activities by praying for warm days in April so that the roses can go outside in the unheated greenhouse and not interfere with the vegetable and perennial plant production inside. It’s extremely fortuitous that I have two little greenhouses on wheels which can be rolled to a sunny sheltered area during the day and rolled back into the garage at night.

The safest hardening-off area happens to be the driveway on the south side of the house because it’s warmer than any other part of the property. There are only two major drawbacks to my system. In the spring, the sun is very intense and if I’m not careful, the plants cook. The other is that sometimes it’s so windy I have to bungee-cord the greenhouses to the nearest fence before they take off for parts unknown. The first time a greenhouse disappeared I thought it had been stolen; I found it half-way down the

driveway. Now I just consider it part of the entertainment value of gardening. (If you are a regular reader, you already know that it takes very little to amuse me.)

Other than shopping and shopping, (when the catalogs arrive I want to order two of everything to go) there are a few habits pertaining to consumer horticulture that I hope to cultivate more responsibly and less self-indulgently.

This year, I want to concentrate more effort convincing my clients, friends and neighbors to eliminate fabric from their landscapes and understand the absolute greatness of composting. It kills me to see hundreds of giant brown paper bags on garbage day. I can't steal the grass clippings because I have no idea what the lawn waste was treated with chemically. In the fall, though, I swipe the bags full of leaves, dump them in back, chop them up with the mulching mower or feed them to the shredder. Then I fold up the bags as neatly as possible and return them to the homes where I found them. What I can't use at the moment, I store for spring on the side of the garage and behind anything where they can't be seen till spring. A word of warning: if you have allergies to mold it's not a good idea to open the bags without a gas mask.

Many of my neighbors enjoy gardening on a small scale and Nutcase tries to teach by example. I don't expect everyone to practice everything we do because many times their eyes bulge when they tour the nursery. But I know that when they see our operation they realize that they can do many things in their own yards with relative ease. We welcome visitors and their questions with open arms because that's what Master Gardeners do. We are the Extension in the community. Free consultations are a great way to meet people although sometimes there is the drawback of having to be the bearer of bad news.

It's wonderful to see people using mulch but it's painful telling them that they are killing their trees by mounding it too high and too close. One of the new neighbors spent weeks building wooden boxes around several of the trees in his backyard. We watched from our window and admired his work ethic. One day, Himself said to me, "Aren't you going to go talk to him about what he's doing to his trees?"

I guess my missions have worn off on him. Head hung low, I trekked down the street to deliver the bad news. The young couple did not look happy to see me coming or going. So we watched and waited.

It took a couple of weeks but the wood was finally lowered and a great deal of mulch disappeared. I'm keeping an eye out for signs of stress but so far it seems that my butting in was worth it. And I guess I haven't really made enemies because the first-time homeowners have asked for culture and pruning advice since then. For more resistant subjects I hand out the little yellow sheets with the Hot-Line info so they can contact the Extension and speak with "official" people. Flashing my badge doesn't always do the trick.

And that leads me to something else I want to share with you.

I came across an old, old book that I believe belonged to my father. It's so old that the chapters are noted in Roman numerals. It was originally printed in 1935 and the edition I have was a 1941 reprint. I thought it might be an interesting winter read.

You have to be very careful when browsing old material because a lot has changed, especially in horticulture. There are precious few photographs, all black and white, but plenty of detailed illustrations of tools, composters, cold frames, conservatories, instructions for forcing bulbs indoors, propagating new plants and such. I greatly enjoyed the comments that accompanied the wisdom, such as it only cost ten or fifteen cents for the oil you put in the sand buckets used for cleaning your hand tools. Or "sandpaper is now manufactured that may be used while wet and this helps considerably" when cleaning your tools. Or this direction for purchasing a sprayer: "It always pays to buy a good sprayer in the first place. A ten or fifteen cent sprayer will do the work for a while, but will be the most expensive in the end."

One of the chapters was entitled "Garden Magic Marches On." It was subtitled as a supplementary review of a decade of horticultural developments. What a marvelous piece of history! It struck me that while we have been furthering the movement commonly known today as "Eat Locally," that movement is nothing more than another take on the concept of the Victory Garden.

The Victory Garden Program was a direct result of World War II. In 1941, at a National Garden Conference called by the U. S. Department of Agriculture to consider a plan for defense measures by increasing food production, the concept of the "Defense" garden was introduced. But that moniker was quickly discarded in favor of the term "Victory Garden." It was first felt, officially, that more and larger farm gardens were the answer in the way of increased food production.

Five years and four National Garden Conferences later, it was realized that home gardens, rather than commercial gardens, could amazingly reduce the demand for transportation, containers, labor and other factors involved with larger scale food production. It was this movement that motivated the Department of Agriculture, as its attitude changed and broadened, that led it to endorsing plans for the expansion of the Extension Service facilities to provide more horticultural help for homeowners in cities, suburbs and villages.

And this is how Master Gardeners were born. In today's economy I think we stand an excellent chance of doing our jobs prouder, louder and more often.

Some Information You Should Know

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Currently Available Opportunities: Communications,
Education, Project Support, Volunteer Activities

Mission Statement

It is the Master Gardener Society of Oakland County's Mission to assist, enable, and encourage its members to use their horticultural knowledge and experience to help the people of their communities, enrich their lives through gardening and good gardening practices.

Michigan State University Extension- Oakland County
“Bringing Knowledge to Life”

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