

**Master Gardeners Meeting**  
**September 6, 7:00 p.m.**  
**'Rainwater Harvesting'**



Our rainfall here is pretty meager. Learn how to get the maximum benefit from the little bit we receive. We will discuss how to manipulate water flow as well as collection systems. Sue Martin, Horticulture Technician, will be our speaker. She has worked for the U of A Graham County Cooperative Extension for 2 years and is a Master Gardener. As part of the job she began doing water education in the schools and the community. She completed Project W.E.T. facilitators training. She was on the Gila Valley Water Advisory Board, working with Gila Resources and the National Resource Conservation Service to promote water conservation.

Persons with a disability may request a reasonable accommodation, such as a sign language interpreter, by contacting U of A Graham County Cooperative Extension at 520-428-2611. Requests should be made as early as possible to allow time to arrange the accommodation.

ARIZONA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
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**Cooperative Extension** The University of Arizona • College of Agriculture & Life Sciences •

**GRAHAM COUNTY GARDENING**

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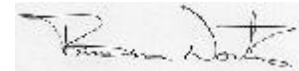
September 2001

In case you hadn't noticed, we are experimenting with a new format for the newsletter as we try to improve the quality. We welcome any and all feedback. Tell us what you think

## Upcoming Events

- Saturdays Farmers Market, rumor has it that it is now on Saturday mornings, Firth Park
- Sep. 6 Master Gardener Meeting, Rainwater Harvesting, 7:00 p.m., Master Gardener Business Meeting, 5:30 p.m., Safford City/Graham County Public Library, PD Room
- Sep. 11? Greenhouse Class, City of Safford Recreation Division, 6 week course, 6:30-8:30 p.m., call Susan Syfert (428-7242) to register
- Sep. 22 Tucson Iris Society Fall Sale, El Con Mall, Tucson
- Sep. 29 Trail Design Workshop, 8:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m., call Extension Office for details and to reserve a seat
- Oct. 4 Master Gardener Meeting, Annuals to Plant in the Fall, 7:00 p.m., Master Gardener Business Meeting, 5:30 p.m., Safford City/Graham County Public Library, PD Room
- Oct. 6-7 Fall Plant Sale, Tucson Botanical Garden
- Oct. 11-14 Graham County Fair
- Oct. 12-28 Fall Landscaping Festival and Plant Sale, Boyce Thompson Arboretum
- Oct. 19-21 Fall Landscape Plant Sale and Festival, Desert Botanical Garden, Phoenix
- Oct. 26 Community Emergency Preparedness Fair
- Oct. 27 Harvest Festival, 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Safford Town Square
- Oct. 27-28 La Fiesta de los Chiles, Tucson Botanical Garden
- Nov. 16 Gila Valley Greenhouse Seminar, Safford City/Graham County Public Library, PD Room

Edited by: Sue Martin  
Ruth Anne Neff



E. Randall Norton  
Agriculture Agent

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## In the September Garden:

- C Plant beets, broccoli (there is a chance of heads freezing when planting this late), brussel sprouts (see broccoli), cabbage (plants), carrots, cauliflower (see broccoli), chard, garlic, kale, leaf lettuce, leeks, mustard greens, parsley, onion seeds, green bun ching onions, peas, radishes, and spinach all month.
- C Plant head lettuce through the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month.
- C Bermudagrass that is not to be overseeded with ryegrass should be given one last dose of fertilizer before cooler temperatures slow growth. Begin decreasing the amount of water by a little bit each week.
- C If you are going to overseed your bermudagrass with ryegrass, prepare it now. Plant the seed between September 15 and October 15 for best results.
- C Transplant pansies and dragons stock

## Plant of the Month

### Texas Mountain Laurel, Mescal Bean *Sophora secundiflora*

Texas mountain laurel is a large attractive evergreen shrub in the pea family. It is native to an area from central Texas to New Mexico and into northern Mexico. It is normally a multi-stemmed shrub but can be trained into a small tree. Because it has no thorns it is valuable near patios and walkways. It grows slowly but can eventually reach a height of 25' or more in ideal conditions. It is very drought

tolerant and thrives in heat and alkaline soil, but may need some supplemental water here. It does require good drainage. It is frost hardy to at least 10 degrees.

The leaves are 4 to 6" long and are made up of 7-9 glossy, dark green, oval leaflets. The mountain laurel puts on a spectacular show in the early spring, typically in March or April. Large drooping clusters of purple flowers appear, much like wisteria, and perfume the air with the scent of grape kool-aid.

The flowers are followed by woody, bean-like seed pods. The seeds inside are a beautiful shiny red and have been strung as beads. They are, however, highly poisonous. If this may be a problem with children or pets, simply remove the pods as they form.

The mountain laurel is bothered by few pests or

diseases. New growth may occasionally eaten by Pyralid moth caterpillars. Severe infestations may be controlled by *Bacillus thuringiensis* (commonly called Bt), a biological control that kills only the pest.

Mountain laurels require little maintenance. They should never be pruned hard. Training cuts to keep an attractive shape and remove the seed pods are all that are necessary.

Arizona mountain laurel, *Sophora arizonica*, is a related species that is native to western and central Arizona hillsides. It has smaller leaves with a more silvery color and is even slower growing. The color and fragrance of the blooms are similar. As far as we know, this species is not available at nurseries.

## Bug of the Month

### Tortoise Beetle

**Description:** Tortoise beetles are small beetles about 1/4" to 1/3" long that resemble ladybugs. They are flat below and have a shell that extends beyond the body itself. Much of the head and legs are thus hidden, making them resemble a tortoise. They come in a variety of colors and may be spotted or banded, depending on the species. The larva reach about 3/8" and are somewhat flattened and wormlike. They are spiny and use the two extra-long spines at the rear to hold their excrement and skins as they are shed. These spines are often carried over the back, somewhat like a squirrel tail. The larvae begin to look like moving bits of dirt. This seems to offer them protection from predators. The larva seen at the Safford Ag Center are creamy white/yellow in color. The pupal stage is light green.

**Damage/Benefits:** Both the larvae and adults feed on leaves. Adults leave holes in the leaves about the size of the beetles. The larvae can either chew holes or "skeletonize" the leaves. Young plants may be eaten entirely. The good news is they love morning glories and bindweed. The bad news is they also attack plants in the Solanaceae family, which includes eggplant, peppers, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes.

**Life cycle:** The adult beetles overwinter under bark and trash. They emerge in May or June and begin feeding. They lay eggs which hatch during June or July. After feeding and completing their larval development, they attach to the underside of a leaf and pupate. The adults emerge a short time later, feed and find a spot to hibernate.

**Control:** Eliminate their weed hosts (bindweed and morning glory) and clean your garden beds of debris at the end of the season. An insecticide that is registered for use on chewing insects offers good control.

## Forcing Spring Bulbs

There is nothing like a pot of fragrant narcissus or hyacinths on your windowsill in the middle of winter to lift your spirits. If you plan now, you can have flowers at Christmas, New Year's, or any occasion you wish. The practice of making bulbs bloom outside of their normal times is called "forcing". Almost any spring flowering bulb (crocus, daffodil, grape hyacinth, hyacinth, tulip) can be forced. Bulb catalogs will often specify which varieties are best for forcing. All bulbs except Tazetta narcissus ('Paper White' and 'Soleil d'Or') require chilling to stimulate flower bud formation. Narcissus should bloom 5-7 weeks after planting. They do appreciate cool night temperatures.

Select a pot with good drainage. Loosely fill with potting soil and plant the bulbs so that just the tip shows above the soil line. Bulbs can be planted side by side in the pot. The more the merrier! Water the pot thoroughly and allow to drain. Place the pot in the refrigerator or someplace where they will remain at 35-45 degrees F. Keep chilled for 10-14 weeks or longer. Larger bulbs, daffodils, tulips and hyacinths, require the longest chilling period. Crocus, grape hyacinths, and snowdrops need less chilling.

After 5 or 6 weeks, roots should be well established and top growth may even have begun. After the chilling period is completed, remove the pot from the refrigerator and place in a cool bright window out of direct sun. Temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees F. are ideal. There is usually sufficient energy in the bulbs to produce flowers but an application of half strength fertilizer as they are brought out of cold storage may be helpful. The plant should bloom in 3 -4 weeks. Once the flowers are open, the pot may be displayed wherever you wish and enjoyed. For maximum flowering time, move the pot back to a cool spot at night.

Some bulbs can even be grown in old fashioned forcing jars or hyacinth glasses. These jars have a narrow mouth to support the bulb barely above the

water level. If the bulb were to sit in the water it would rot. Hyacinths and crocus are most commonly grown in jars. The water-filled jar and bulb need to be chilled just as for potted bulbs. Keep the water level just millimeters below the bulb at all time. The roots will be clearly visible as they grow in the water. After the required chilling period, bring out and enjoy. Children are particularly fascinated by bulbs grown in jars.

Once a bulb has been forced, it is usually spent and should be discarded.

To time your blooms for a particular occasion, add 3-4 weeks to the chilling period (10-14 weeks). Count back that many weeks from the date you would like to have blooms and that will give you the “start” date. Bringing pots out of chilled storage about a week apart will assure that some are blooming when you want them.