Graham County Gardening Newsletter

November/December 2006 Volume 10, No. 8

How Can I Help?

The following list is for:

1. Master Gardeners working for certification or continuing certification
2. Anyone who wants to help and learn about gardening

The Master Gardener Program Policy identifies and differentiates between education and volunteer hours. In many cases, an event can include both types of hours. For example, you can gain many educational hours at the Gardening and Landscaping Conference as well as assisting in activities before and during the conference.

Call Karen Thomson and she will assist you in scheduling your time as well as documenting your personal record of certification hours; and if needed, assist in identifying your type of activity as volunteer and/or educational.

Educational Hours

Pruning Demonstration—
Saturday, November 18, 2006
Third Annual Gila Valley Gardening & Landscaping Conf.
Saturday, February 24, 2007

Volunteer Hours

Pruning Demonstration
Third Annual Gila Valley Gardening & Landscaping Conf.
Harvest Festival
Home Garden Tour
14th Avenue Cleanup
Edu-Venture Trail
Greenhouse
Junior Master Gardeners
Bag Agrosoke
Extension Office Landscaping
Vegetable Trials
Reading Garden
City Hall Annex Roses
Chamber Planter Boxes
Water Wise Workshop
Water Wagon Assistance
Photos and Mountings of Native Grasses, Wildflowers, Trees, Shrubs of Graham & Greenlee
Gila Valley Children's Home
Others may be identified

Call Karen Thomson at 928-428-2611 or e-mail karent@ag.arizona.edu for details.

Saturday, November 18

Pruning Demonstration

Safford Ag Center
9:00 to 12 noon

We are most fortunate to have our own Dr. Randy Norton of the Safford Ag Center presenting and demonstrating **Pruning Of and Care Of Landscape Trees and Shrubs and Fruit Trees.**

Pruning has been included in the Annual Gila Valley Gardening and Landscaping Conference but there never seems to be enough time for full presentation. So, a return is being made to a special day for pruning information only.

Refreshments will be served.

Inside This Issue

Meet Karen

Karen Thomson, who recently moved to Arizona, is the new Extension Program Assistant, Lead, in the Cooperative Extension Office.

Karen is the certified Master Gardener "on site" who will answer gardening questions either in person, by telephone, or e-mail. Other certified Master Gardeners assist when she is not available. She will also assist with certification of new Master Gardeners, conference, etc.

Karen was born in Connecticut, living and gardening there as well as other states including North Carolina where she started a small herb farm in 1998. She grew between 50 and 100 varieties of plants including heirloom vegetables and herbs for sale to the public and nurseries as potted plants or fresh cut herbs. The farm included a greenhouse, summer and winter gardens, pond gardens and fruit trees.

The farm was sold in 2001 and Karen and her husband traveled for almost four years volunteering in Wildlife Refuges and the Forest Service in different parts of the country. Various projects included landscaping and developing plant identification pamphlets of the areas.

She became a Master Gardener in 2001 in South Carolina and then received a second Master Gardener Certificate through the University of Arizona Graham County Cooperative Extension Program in 2005.

Call 928-428-2611, talk to Karen or leave a message or e-mail, karent@ag.arizona.edu, with your gardening questions.

Question: How do I test germination of old seed?

Answer: Gardeners sometimes save seeds from year to year. These may be unused packets of commercial vegetables and flowers or seed saved from crops they have grown themselves. If the plants are not hybrids, but open pollinated, seed can be successfully saved. Germination of seed may not be good and if not, can cost valuable time and cost of replanting. An easy home germination test can be made by counting ten or more seeds and laying them on two or three sections of paper towel in a glass or jar of water and set it in a sunny window or other location for seven to ten days, adding enough water in the container to keep the towel moist. After seven to ten days, unroll the towel and count the germinated seeds. You can also plant ten seeds in the soil in a warm sunny location, keep moist, and wait for germination.

Question: When and how do I plant bulbs for spring flowers?

Answer: Most bulbs for spring flowers are planted during the months of September, October and November. Soil preparation is important. If you have a heavy class type of soil in your flower bed, remove two to four inches of the soil and apply a layer of one to two inches of sand and a layer of one to two inches of peat moss or other organic material. Use 16-20 fertilizer or a balanced fertilizer such as 5-10-10 to an area 50 sq. ft. or 5 ft. by 10 ft. Spade or roto till the soil to a depth of 8 to 12 inches. Keep mixing the sand, peat moss, and fertilizer into the soil. For lighter soil, apply only the peat moss and fertilizer before working the soil.

The flower beds should be in direct sunlight. Hyacinth, iris, and tulips plus many others may be planted. Ranuculus do well in the local area, but are usually planted a little later.

If you have problems with gophers, dig a trench or hole and line it with fine mesh chicken wire. Plant bulbs as recommended and cover at recommended depth.

Question: Can I grow bulbs in containers?

Answer: Most bulbs are quite easy to grow in containers such as flower pots or medium to large containers such as wooden barrels which have been cut into two. Such bulbs as daffodils, tulips, crocuses, Dutch iris, hyacinths and freesias can be planted in a container for their first spring bloom and afterwards planted in the garden. You should use a good container soil mixture made up of equal parts of good garden soil, coarse sand and organic material such as peat moss, leaf mold, compost or ground bark. Set the bulbs on the container soil four inches below the pot rim. Bulbs should be placed closely together and covered with two inches of soil leaving two inches of space at top for watering. Tamp soil down firmly and set pots in a cool shady area or unheated location and wet soil. After watering, mound three to four inches of wood shavings on top of the pot and dampen shavings with water. When leaves start to grow, move into full sun. Flowers will start to appear about four months after planting bulbs.

(continued on page 3)

Fall and Winter Gardening

Question: How do I turn fallen leaves into compost?
Answer: A fairly simple compost pile can be made by using wire fencing. Tie it together in a cylinder to contain the leaves and other compost material. Other residues which make good compost include: grass clippings, kitchen scraps like citrus peels, vegetables, potatoe peels, hedge clippings and corn stalks. If you are serious about composting, you can purchase a small grinder which will chop branches, cornstalks, and leaves into small fragments which will break down faster. To keep from causing an odor, the compost pile needs to have air and be turned once a week with moisture added as needed. A few handfuls of complete commercial fertilizer added to each load of raw materials will produce more rapid decomposition. Material may be decomposed and ready to use in six weeks to six months depending on temperature, moisture and size of material.

OR, you can crush leaves, spread them on gardening bed and till the crushed leaves into the soil where they will begin breakdown during the winter months.

Question: When should I apply nitrogen fertilizer?
Answer: Nitrogen is one of the main plant foods or nutrients necessary to make plants grow. It is surprising how many home owners and gardeners in the Gila Valley never feed their lawns, trees and shrubs, or gardens with any kind of nitrogen fertilizer. Nitrogen is the most needed plant food for this area and is the most commonly deficient plant nutrient. Nitrogem starved plants grow slowly. New leaves are small and pale green. The older leaves turn yellow and fall off or die. Nitrogen is taken up by plant roots from the soil and is used in the formation of many plant tissues and compounds such as proteins and chlorophyll (green plant pigment). Most plants need to be fertilized on a regular basis with nitrogen fertilizers. There are many different fertilizers or plant foods you can purchase which contain nitrogen. The first of the three numbers shown on a fertilizer label indicates the percentage of nitrogen in that bag. Fertilizer labeled 10-7-7 would contain 10% nitrogen by weight. Your plants will grow better if you use nitrogen on a regular basis. Follow the label instructions.

Question: When should I apply phosphorus fertilizer?
Answer: Phosphorus fertilizer is one of the three primary plant nutrients. Phosphorus is the second of the three package numbers shown on a fertilizer table. If you purchase 1 bag of fertilizer which is labeled 16-20-0, you know the material contains 20% phosphorus by weight. Phosphorus is probably the second most important plant nutrient for the Gila Valley Area with nitrogen being first. It is used in all phases of plant growth and in all parts of the plant. In the soil, phosphorus is taken in by plants in the form of phosphate. Phosphorus does not move in the soil and usually lasts for a long time so regular applications are not always necessary. Phosphorus deficient plants will show poor flowering and fruiting. Plants that are only slightly deficient in phosphorus will grow more slowly than normal and produce fewer flowers and fruit but often have no specific symptoms. For this reason, it is a good practice to apply phosphorus fertilizer once a year. Because phosphorus does not move in the soil, it is best to place it in the root zone of plants.

Question: Is manure good for my home garden?
Answer: Manure has been used by gardeners and farmers for centuries. But using manure in the desert areas of the southwest presents problems not generally encountered in areas of higher rainfall. Our problem is the presence of high soluble salts and alkali in our soils. Manure also contains a high content of salt. Excessive salt in manure added to the already salty soil; can cause problems to gardeners, even killing plants. However, manure in proper quantities and managed correctly can benefit soils with the plant nutrients and organic matter. The organic matter in manure helps open up tight heavy soils, allows better water and root penetration, and aids air exchange so the plants can utilize nutrients. Organic matter also improves water holding capacity. Different kinds of manure are stronger than others. If applied, poultry manure should be applied and incorporated into the soil six to eight weeks before planting. Water soil several times to begin the decomposition process and to leach out excessive soluble salts.

If you like to use manure in your vegetable or flower garden plots, you should apply the manure one to two months before you plant your seeds or (continued on page 4)

Fall and Winter Gardening Work (Cont. from page 3)

transplants. Manure should be spread on the surface of the soil and then worked into the soil to a depth of ten to twelve inches. After thoroughly mixing the manure and soil, the soil should be irrigated to begin the decomposition process. Manure mixed into the garden soil too close to planting time will damage or kill the seedlings when it begins to produce ammonia during the nitrification process. Most manure contains a high amount of salt and should not be applied excessively to our alkaline soils or the soil will temporarily become toxic to plants until the salt can be leached below the root zone with irrigation water. Manure can be used as a mulch in vegetable gardens and around trees and plants without burning if it is spread on the surface without incorporating it into the soil and letting the irrigation water percolate through it.

Question: How do I develop green manure?
Answer: A green manure crop can be helpful in improving your workable garden spot. Crops like wheat, barley, or oats can be planted and worked into the soil after growing. Their root system opens and prepares the soil. This helps to eliminate nematodes and disease. Plant four to five pounds of grain/1000 sq. ft. Apply ten pounds 16-20 ammonia phosphate/1000 sq. ft. Irrigate as necessary. Black-eyed peas in summer are a good green manure crop. Apply extra commercial fertilizer when you turn under a green manure crop. Gypsum or sulphur will also help.

Question: What is fall lawn weed control?
Answer: If you have not over seeded your Bermuda lawns with winter grass, fall is an excellent time to help control annual weeks which grow in the grass. There are many ungerminated weed seeds which will lie dormant in your Bermuda lawns until next spring or summer, as well as winter weed seed such as mustard or pepper grass which will germinate in your dormant lawn this winter. These germinating weeds can be eliminated with an application of pre-immergence herbicide. Dacthal, or Surflan, are two excellent materials which can be mixed with water and sprayed on your lawn in the fall. When incorporated into the soil surface by irrigation or rain, this herbicide will kill the small weed seedlings as they germinate for six months or so of the fall and winter. Be sure to follow the label directions when applying. DON'T use if overseeding a winter lawn.

How to care for and plant a live Christmas Tree.
For the best care of your floor, place live pine tree in a large metal or plastic pan. While in the house, water the tree with ice cubes, placed right on the soil. Depending on how warm your house is kept, use about one tray of ice cubes per week. Just feel the soil. If dry, add ice.

When it is time to take your tree outside, set it by your house out of the wind for about two weeks. Your tree needs to get "hardened off" after being in a warm house. To water the tree outside, just spray the top and whatever water runs down the trunk is enough. NEVER water directly into the container as you will melt the root ball.

When ready to plant, dig your hole about two to three inches wider than the container and about the same depth as the container. If your tree has burlap in the container, lift the tree out by the burlap and plant the burlap with the tree. If your tree has no burlap, cut out the bottom of the container, then half way up two sides. Place the tree in the hole with the bottom out but with sides on. Finish cutting the sides off the container and remove container. Fill dirt in around the tree and lightly tamp down. Do not add soil amendments or fertilizer. Gently water deeply, but do not overwater. NEVER, NEVER PLANT YOUR PINE TREE DEEPER THAN IT IS IN THE SOIL IN THE CONTAINER!

When the temperature starts to warm up above 80 degrees, water deeply every six weeks if there is no precipitation.

Acknowledgment: Cooper's Nursery, Pima, Arizona

Care of Christmas Poinsettia.
To care for poinsettia plants at Christmas and to make them last longer, place the plants in a sunny window. Avoid sudden temperature changes. Keep the soil moist but don't let water stand in the saucer at the bottom of the pot. The plants will grow all year if planted or kept in a warm sunny location. Refer to the Dec. 2005 Newsletter for details in developing into a blooming plant for the next year or look up on the Internet.

In your November Garden!

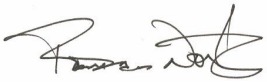
- Prune to remove dead or diseased limbs but save heavy pruning until plants are dormant,
- Plant beets, carrots, chard, garlic cloves, leaf lettuce, green bunching onions, radishes, and spinach.
- Transplant asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and Brussel sprouts. Fertilize two weeks after setting out with a gentle liquid fertilizer.
- Direct seed alyssum, sweet peas, and spring wildflowers in the garden.
- Set out perennials and cool season annuals, such as, calendula, chrysanthemums, dianthus, daisies, larkspur, pansies, primroses, snapdragons, stocks, and violas.
- Divide crowded perennials (callas, daylilies, iris, yarrow, aster, coreopsis, and daisies) when finished blooming.
- Plant spring flowering bulbs such as iris, tulips, daffodils, crocus, and hyacinth.
- Plant strawberries.
- Best time to plant trees and shrubs.
- Control aphids and whiteflies by hosing them off of your plants or spraying with insecticidal soap.
- Slowly decrease the frequency of watering for established trees and shrubs.

In your December Garden!

- Save heavy pruning until plants are fully dormant. Prune now only to remove dead or diseased limbs.
- Add compost and manure to garden beds as they become vacant.
- Remove all old fruit (mummies) from trees and all debris from the ground below. Sprinkle granular insecticide to reduce existing insects. This will significantly reduce the codling moth problem next year.
- Direct seed alyssum, sweet peas, and spring wild flowers in the garden.
- Set out perennials and cool season annuals, such as calendula, chrysanthemums, dianthus, daisies, larkspur, pansies, snapdragons, stocks, and violas.
- If you buy spring flowering bulbs, plant immediately.
- Pre-emergent herbicides can still be applied early this month for winter annual weed control. Follow package directions carefully.
- Start to plant bare rooted trees, roses, grapes and cane berries later in the month.
- When frost is predicted, protect citrus and other tender plants with cloth, burlap, or rowcovers. Make sure to suspend them so they don't hang on the leaves. Remove or open coverings in the mornings. Between rains, irrigate deep rooted plants (such as trees) occasionally, but thoroughly,. Shallow-rooted plants require water more often.

Staff

Graham Extension Agriculture Agent:
Randall Norton, Ph.D.



Graham Extension Director:…...Carol Willis

Send Comments or Questions by e-mail to:
dorinec@ag.arizona.edu or call 928-428-2611

Pruning Demonstration **Saturday, 9:00 to 12:00 noon**	**November 18, 2007**
Gardening & Landscaping Class **Tuesdays, 9:30 to 12:30 Noon**	**January 26 – May 10, 2007**
Third Annual Gila Valley Gardening **& Landscaping Conference**	**Saturday, February 24, 2007**
Home Garden Tour	**Saturday, May 12, 2007**

Details will be announced as date for event nears.

Tucson Botanical Gardens—Butterfly Magic at the Gardens	**Oct. 10 to Feb. 28, 2007**
Boyce Thompson Arboretum Fall Color Festival	**November 25 – 26, 10 to 3 p.m.**

NOTICE!!

Gardening Newsletter will move to a new publication schedule. It will be distributed on a two-month schedule beginning with the January/February, 2007, Edition.

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