



# The Dirt Desk News



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## OUT & ABOUT

**Boyce Thompson Arboretum will hold their fall plant sale October 5 - 21.**

**Tucson Botanical Gardens will hold their fall plant sale September 29 from 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

**Tucson Botanical Gardens Butterfly Magic runs October 16, 2007 - March 31, 2008.**

**Arizona Highlands Garden Conference 2007 will be held October 11 & 12 at the Apache Gold Casino, San Carlos. (Located 5 miles east of Globe on Hwy 70.) Reservations are required.**

**For more information or a registration brochure please call Graham County Cooperative Extension at 428-2611 or register on line at [cals.arizona.edu/gila/horticulture](http://cals.arizona.edu/gila/horticulture)**

**Workshops for the Home Gardener - next Workshop is Saturday, October 13 at the Safford Agricultural Center on Montierth Lane in Safford. The hands on topic will be Tree Planting presented by Trinity Landscaping. For more information call 428-2611 or email [karent@ag.arizona.edu](mailto:karent@ag.arizona.edu)**



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## What's that Noise?

By Marilyn Weaver

Since I live and work in a rural setting, I have witnessed on more than one occasion what we in a less urban environment might think is a strange and sometimes



humorous human reaction. Specifically, I'm speaking of the reaction to the sometimes deafening sound of cicadas. It seems some folks who have lived in large cities all their lives are unfamiliar with that all too familiar late summer, early fall ruckus us small town dwellers recognize. The reactions range from hearing aids being adjusted, to small children running terrified and crying into the skirts of their mothers. I am inevitably asked, "What's that noise?"

Male cicadas (si-ka'-da) are the source of that sound of mayhem coming from the trees. It is their way of attracting females. One might think that many insects could do a lot of damage to foliage, gardens and crops, but it's insufficient to cause real harm to plants. Stem tips may look like they are suffering from die back. That is caused when females make tiny bite marks on tender plant tissue and then insert an egg. The eggs hatch, the grubs drop to the ground and burrow into the soil, and then eat organic matter for a year or two before emerging as adults. As the adults shed their skins, they can be seen stuck to fence posts, tree trunks, on the sides of buildings or left on the ground.

There is a beneficial wasp that preys on cicadas; therefore no chemical control is needed. Just be thankful they quiet down after dark. If you are feeling particularly ornery when asked by a visitor, "What's that noise?", you can always tell 'em it's a rattlesnake tree, and they sound mad!

## WATER

### Monsoon Update

The Monsoon was officially over on Tuesday, September 11, 2007. Many areas in the state received sporadic down pours, some areas received none. Sky Harbor in Phoenix received 0.67 inch of



rain. How did the Gila Valley do? According to The Safford Agricultural Center Experimental Station on Montierth Lane in Safford, the July rain total was 2.67 inches and the August total was 3 inches. September received no significant rain before the Monsoon ended. Our Monsoon total was 5.67 inches. The average is 3.5 inches for the season. The forecast is for a dry winter as El Nina is bringing falling temperatures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean.

Information from the Safford Agricultural Center weather station and Brown & Caldwell's Arizona Water News.



## AROUND TOWN

"AMERICAN GOTHIC" - Diane Drobka, Bee Lancaster, Patty Curtis and Lorraine McGhee working hard at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church on the Desert Landscape project.



## GARDEN PROJECT

The St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church in Safford landscaping project is coming along. Grass and weeds have been removed and desert plants have been added. The next installation for this project will be dry riverbeds on either side of the walkway.



Bee Lancaster and Patty Curtis answer questions in the Master Gardener booth at the Tri County Expo.

## TRI COUNTY EXPO

Bee Lancaster and Patty Curtis help inquiring people at the Master Gardener booth.

The Tri County Expo was held Friday, August 31 and Saturday, September 1 at the old Wal Mart building in Thatcher. The Graham County Master Gardeners were given floor space for a booth at the Expo that was manned by volunteers both days. The Master Gardeners had aloe vera plants, seeds and posters to give away along with literature and knowledge. A special appearance by a tobacco horn worm added interest for the kids. Thanks to Patty Curtis, Bee Lancaster, Ginny Peck, Mike Weatherhead, (who also did a workshop on making containers out of old tires), Pat Brubaker, Diane Drobka, Jim and Karen Thomson for lending a hand and making the booth so successful and talking to over two hundred people!

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## WORKSHOP NEWS

Workshops for the Home Gardeners new series will be held at the Safford Agricultural Center on 2134 S. Montierth Lane, Safford. All Workshops are the second Saturday of the month, begin at 10 a.m. and are HANDS ON learning. Workshops scheduled through 2007 are:

October 13 *Tree Planting* presented by Trinity Landscaping,  
November 10 - *Tool Maintenance* presented by NCE  
December 8 - *Planning Your Summer Garden* presented by the Master Gardeners.

## IN THE GARDEN

### In the October Garden:

- Plant beets, carrots, chard, garlic cloves, onion seeds, peas, radishes, and spinach all month.
- Transplant asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and Brussel sprouts. Fertilize 2 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.
- Plant spring bulbs such as iris, tulips, daffodils, crocus, and hyacinth now through November.
- Plant strawberry plants.
- Fall is the best time to plant trees and shrubs.
- Divide crowded perennials (callas, daylilies, iris, yarrow, asters, coreopsis, and daisies) when finished blooming. Dig up a clump with its root ball intact and shake off excess dirt. The clump may be divided by inserting 2 spading forks back to back and gently separating them or by cutting the clumps with a sharp knife. Make sure each division has some leaves and plenty of roots. Replant them immediately. Or share your extras with a friend or neighbor!
- Fertilize roses and continue to remove spent blooms. Cool weather causes aphids and whiteflies to multiply. Control them by hosing them off of your plants or spraying with insecticidal soap.
- If Bermuda grass lawns are to be over seeded, this is the time to do it. Tall fescue or annual or perennial rye are most commonly grown here. Mow closely, spread your seed, and mulch lightly. Keep the surface of the soil moist until seeds sprout. Fertilize when the new grass is 6 weeks old.
- Now is the ideal time to seed or repair fescue lawns.
- Slowly decrease the frequency of watering for established trees and shrubs.

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## Invasive and Noxious Weeds - Malta Starthistle

by Kim McRenyolds, Area Agent, Ag. Natural Resources, Cochise County

Malta starthistle (*Centaurea melitensis* L.), also called tocalote or Napa starthistle, is an annual invasive weed gaining ground in Graham County the last few years. It can be seen easily along roadsides in the county during late spring (usually April to May). It was introduced from southern Europe in the 1700's and has spread through much of the western United States. Like so many invasive weed species, Malta starthistle can rapidly displace diverse native vegetation and create a nearly pure stand of the weed. Its root structure is ineffective at protecting soil against erosion. The spiny flowerhead on Malta starthistle guarantees that recreationists will avoid infested areas.



### What does Malta starthistle look like?

Malta starthistle is a grayish-green annual with winged stems. The rosettes of the plants have entire or deeply lobed leaves, and the surfaces are evenly covered with stiff, thick hairs and resinous dots. The leaf margins can be smooth, toothed, or wavy. Adult plants grow stiff stems 1 foot to 2 feet tall that branch from just above the base. The stem leaves are alternate, narrow, and unlobed, with the attached leaf bases continuing down the ridged stems, giving the appearance of green wings. The flowers are small and yellow, about 1/2 inch in height, and have a wooly appearance in the bud stage. Flowers are produced from May through September in groups of up to three at the tips of the branches. Straw colored spines tinged with purple or brown are produced below the flower head. While both yellow and Malta starthistles have winged stems



and yellow flowers, the spines on Malta starthistle are shorter (5-10 mm vs. 10-25 mm for yellow starthistle) and usually purplish at the base. The largest spine of each of the middle bracts is usually branched below, with smaller spines at the base. Malta starthistle has only pappus-bearing seed, and the spiny bracts surrounding the flowers do not fall off in winter, as they do with yellow starthistle. The plants often complete flowering and die back earlier than yellow starthistle, and the taproots do not extend as deep into the ground.

### Where does it grow?

Malta starthistle is found in alfalfa and grain fields, grasslands, pastures, banks of irrigation ditches, rangeland, roadsides, and open disturbed sites. It has been found growing at elevations as high as 7200 feet in California and Arizona.

### How does it spread?

Malta starthistle must produce seed to ensure a new crop the following year. Seed production varies widely. Flower heads produce one to 60 or more seeds, and each plant may have one to 100 or more flower heads. The seeds have hairs and hook-like bases that allow them to attach to animals, people, and vehicles, spreading them over greater distances. The young seedlings are very resistant to fall drought, allowing them to survive in Arizona's dry climate. They are capable of tolerating drought conditions to a greater degree than yellow starthistle. Consequently, Malta starthistle is more common in drier areas, where it appears to be spreading rapidly. Malta starthistle seeds are spread by wind as well as contaminated soil, fill material, gravel, and irrigation water.

Web Sources to view photos of Malta starthistle:

<http://www.cdffa.ca.gov/phpps/ipc/weedinfo/centaurea-melitensis.htm>

<http://cals.arizona.edu/yavapai/anr/hort/byg/archive/starthistles.html>

**If you see this plant, please call your local Extension office at 428-2611 with the location**

## It's Time to Plant a Tree

by Karen Thomson

Autumn is the best time to plant container raised trees and shrubs. The soil is warm ,but the air temperatures are cooling, creating perfect conditions for roots to establish.

The main thing to consider when planting a tree or shrub is: location, location, location. Remember that small 15 gallon tree will mature to 30 plus feet and be wide. Put it where it will have enough room to mature and not become a problem. Take into account utility lines, your house, patio, walkways and existing gardens when selecting a location. Also check with Arizona Blue Stake (1-800-782-5348) for hidden dangers from underground utility lines, including electric, gas, water and sewage. They will send someone out to mark these lines.

### Digging the Hole-

It is recommended that an area 3-5 times the diameter of the root ball be tilled to a depth no deeper than the root ball. Measure the height of the soil IN the container, not the height of the container to determine how deep to till. Dig a hole in the center of the tilled area that is only slightly wider and no deeper than the root ball. The root ball should sit on undisturbed soil. Once planted, the tree will settle and the root collar should remain slightly higher than the surrounding soil. Roots grow laterally, this is why it is beneficial to loosen surrounding soil.

### Planting-

Care is required to avoid damaging the root ball when removing and handling the tree or shrub from its container. Lay the plant and container on its side, cut away any roots that are growing outside of the container's drainage holes and slide the pot away. If you have difficulty, push in on the sides of the container to loosen it from the root ball. Always handle the plant by the container or root ball and not the stem or trunk. Loosen the outer edges of the root ball carefully ,making sure roots aren't circling the root ball. Finger sized or larger circling roots should be cut off where they emerge from the soil to prevent girdling. Circling will inhibit proper



growth and eventually kill the plant. Place the root ball in the hole. The top of the root ball should be level with or slightly above the soil surface. Begin backfilling with the soil dug out of the hole, removing any large rocks or construction debris. Add water as you are backfilling to remove air pockets. Make sure the plant is straight as you are backfilling. Amending the soil is not recommended and may actually be harmful to the plant. The new roots need to grow in the existing soil around it. Amendments will keep the roots in a pocket and won't reach beyond.

### Watering-

Create a well to water your plant. This will help keep water directed toward the roots and won't run off. Apply enough water to wet the soil at least 1 foot deep or to the depth the root ball was set, around the entire root system. Keep the soil moist while the weather is warm, then begin decreasing watering, letting the soil dry out briefly as the temperatures drop. Regardless if the tree is native desert or a non desert species, they all need water until they are established. Once established, one complete growing season, water as recommended by species.

### TIDBIT

*Did you know tree roots can reach a depth of 3 feet and can extend to 4 times the diameter of the tree canopy?*

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*Did you know shrub roots extend to a depth of 2 feet and extend at least 2 times as wide as the canopy of the shrub?*

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*Use a soil probe at the drip line of plants. If the soil is damp, it will push in easily. When it hits dry soil, it will stop. Measure the depth. Remember: 3 feet for trees, 2 feet for shrubs, 1 foot for annuals.*

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## WHAT'S BUGGING YOU?



### Grape Leaf Skeletonizer

by Karen Thomson



The western grape leaf skeletonizer (*Harrisinia brillians*) (WGS) is a major defoliating pest of grapes in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. Gardeners usually discover them when large patches on their grape leaves turn whitish then

brown. Later stages of the WGS will eat the entire leaf, leaving only the larger veins. The metallic bluish-black

female moth has a wingspan of about an inch, and body length if about ½ inch. It has frilly black antennae, is slow moving and not a long distance flyer. It lays pale yellow to whitish capsule shaped eggs, not touching, in clusters on the underside of grape leaves. Spring emergence of the moth occurs after the first flush of leaves, and the first generation of larvae are usually laid on the underside of inner plant leaves. Later generations are found on newer growth. The egg clusters tend to hatch simultaneously into pale white larvae and are about 1/16 inch long. For the next three stages, they pretty much stay together, eating side by side. In a circular pattern. After their yellow and purple/black stripes appear, they move on individually to other undamaged leaves. Once they reach this stage, just a few can skeletonize an entire leaf quickly. There are five stages or instars. The larvae have long dark hairs on their bodies which are poisonous. Some people are sensitive to the hairs and if contact is made, can cause skin welts similar to stinging nettles. Care should be taken not to get the hairs in your eyes or lungs. The larvae will leave the plant, spin a loose dirty white cocoon and pupate for a week or so either in ground litter or loose bark, emerging as a blue-black moth where the cycle will begin again. Control is best when the WGS are in the early larval stage with *Bacillus thuringiensis* or carbaryl.

