

High on the Desert Cochise County Master Gardener Newsletter

Vol.12, No. 7 JULY 2001

The University of Arizona and U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating

Herb Gardening: Site Selection, Soil Preparation & Garden Design

What is an herb? My favorite definition of an herb comes from one of my favorite books on herb gardening, *Herbs in the Garden, The Art of Intermingling* by Rob Proctor and David Macke:

“If you can cook with it; garnish a salad with it; soothe a burn or scratch with it; make a tea from it; soak in the tub with it; perfume your sheets with it; kill a bug with it; make a potpourri, sachet, wreath, or something good smelling with it; treat a disease with it; weave, dye, or spin something with it; worm your pet with it; formulate oils and lotions to beautify your body with it; cast a spell with it; or make a big creation involving a glue gun, wheat stalks, and raffia with it—it’s an herb.”

Herbs are probably the most multi-useful plants on the planet thus making herbs one of the most popular gardening hobbies. And luckily for us herb gardening in the high desert is surprisingly easy.

SITE SELECTION: Many gardening books instruct gardeners to locate a garden in full sun—at least six hours of direct sunlight a day. My experience has shown that most herbs (and vegetables, too) do well with morning sun and afternoon shade—which puts the garden in an eastern exposure location. My herb and vegetable beds are located so they start receiving sunlight at 7 a.m. and filtered shade after 2 p.m. Afternoon shade can be provided by other plants, a fence, the house, lathe structures, or shade cloth.

SOIL PREPARATION: Contrary to popular belief that herbs perform well in poor soils they will do much better with a bit of soil improvement. First the soil must be free of weeds, rocks, and be quick draining. I found that herbs really enjoy raised beds. Make the beds at least a foot deep and mix into the native soil several inches of good garden compost, composted manure, or forest mulch. Compost is king

(Continued on page 2)

Inside this issue:

July Reminders	2
The Virtual Gardener	3
Cuttings 'N' Clippings	4
Agent's Observations	5

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(Continued from page 1)

here—the soil should never be mushy or peaty. Each year I add a couple inches of compost as top-dressing on the beds which doubles as mulch and a fertilizer. Raised beds can be constructed out of any material of your choice. Being a recycling type of gardener, I scrounge and bring home broken concrete sidewalk chunks for the walls of the beds.

GARDEN DESIGN: Here's the fun part. Herb gardens lend themselves to fun, imaginative designs. First ask yourself the following questions: What do you want from your herb garden? Are you interested in culinary herbs for cooking and drying? Or are you interested in having medicinal herbs to treat simple ailments? Or are you interested in herbs for crafting or beauty products? All of these goals can be planted into one garden or separate gardens. It helps to define and set your goals on paper.

How much space do you have for an herb garden(s)? Herbs come in all sizes so plan accordingly. If you have a small space consider using large clay pots. Remember that the garden can be built in stages so start small and expand each year. You will also want to place the garden near a water source for easy irrigation.

As for garden design there are many choices to choose from: a



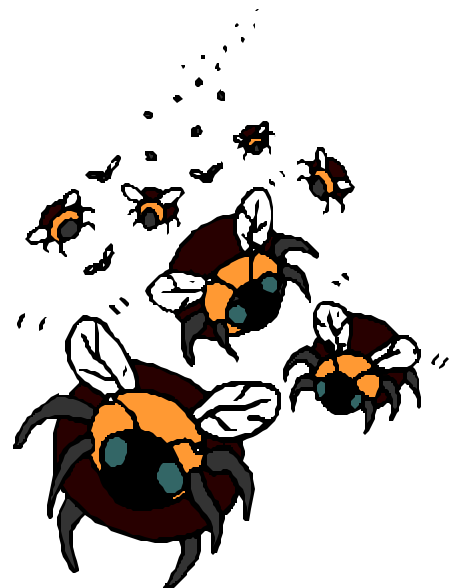
foursquare garden, round garden, border garden, kidney-shaped garden, formal Roman garden, early American wagon wheel garden, knot garden, stacked garden, container garden—the possibilities are endless! Use a garden hose and play around with it on the ground to create your own design. If you have a sloping yard take advantage of it! Slopes can provide a beautiful showcase for herbs and vegetables. Create terraces and plant water-loving plants at the bottom portion where water will tend to seep down and use the drier uphill portions for drought tolerant herbs. Add walking paths through the garden, a bench, or grassy area so you can sit or lay down among the fragrance and relax!

Next time: Herb Gardening: Watering, Mulching & Maintenance.

Cheri Melton
Master Gardener

July Reminders

- Keep the pests under control
- You can still plant something
- Keep watering



Robert E. Call

Robert E. Call
Extension Agent, Horticulture

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Editor

The Virtual Gardener—Patterns in Landscape Design

Christopher Alexander, a professor of architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, has become famous beyond the bounds of his profession for the development of the concept of pattern languages. I first heard of him in connection with software development. Later I read his book, *A Pattern Language* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977) co-authored with Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein, and others. In this book, Alexander lists 253 patterns for architectural design, some applicable to landscaping. Over the next several months I intend to explore with you from time to time some of the patterns described in his book that you can apply in your own landscape designs.

But first, exactly what is a *pattern*? Alexander says a pattern is the description of a recurring problem and a solution of that problem in such general terms that the solution can be applied over and over again without ever specifically repeating it. In this sense, a pattern may be thought of as a rule of thumb that has been refined and proven over time. Patterns are like words. Just as words can be joined together into sentences, so patterns can be joined together to make complete designs.

Patterns cannot be joined together haphazardly, however. Just as we can create either poetry or nonsense with words, so patterns can be joined to create both great designs and terrible designs. Our goal in using patterns is to create land-

scapes that organize outdoor space to make functional areas that bring comfort, joy, and utility to the people who use them.

Let's consider a pattern called *Pools and Streams* from Alexander's book. We desert dwellers, especially those of us who are gardeners, do not have to be told how important water is. It is at the center of our universe and spells the difference between life and death in our gardens.

When Alexander talks about pools and streams in his book, he is primarily talking about water features at the community level, stressing that communities should preserve ponds, natural streams and drainages and provide public access to them rather than plowing them under and erasing them from the landscape. But his thoughts on water are applicable in a smaller setting as well, particularly in this parched desert land.

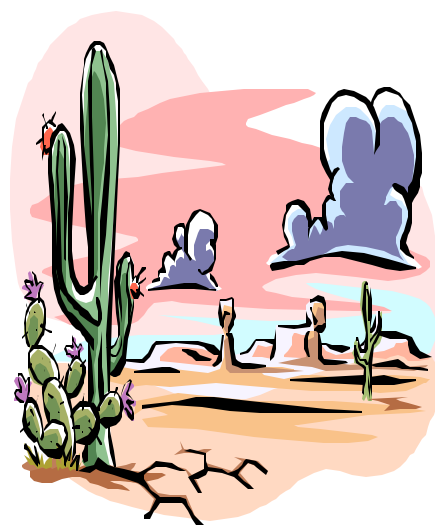
Even in our arid environment, there is a place for water features in our landscape designs, and we need not be considered irresponsible for creating them. The simplest such a feature may be just a shallow container to make water available for birds and small animals. But the most enjoyable feature for me is a fountain. Not a large and wasteful fountain, mind you, but a small one with a recirculating water supply that delights the senses with movement and sound, provides a small pool for thirsty birds and bunnies, and uses a minimal amount of water.

For some ideas for creating water features in your garden, check out the magazine articles on line at www.sunset.com. You can search for articles on fountains, pools, *etc.* For additional information on the use of pattern languages in designs, go to

www.patternlanguage.com. Although most of the information on this site is oriented toward building construction and community planning, you can also get some valuable insights into the philosophy behind pattern languages. And finally, do a search on "pattern language" or "Christopher Alexander" on any of the Web search engines and spend a few hours investigating the hits that come back.

Until next time, happy surfing.

Gary A. Gruenhagen, Master Gardener
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Cuttings 'N' Clippings

* Saturday, August 4 from 9 a.m.—10 a.m. “Planting Techniques” with Master Gardener and Certified Arborist De Lewis. This free one hour workshop will be given at the U of A South 1140 N. Colombo, Sierra Vista. De will teach you how to correctly plant your plants to give them the best “home” in your yard! Don’t miss this great workshop.

* Saturday, September 8 from 9 a.m.—1:00 p.m. The Water Wise/Master Gardener Xeriscape Tour is planned. This free self-guided tour will feature low water use landscapes in the Sierra Vista area. A must for all! Mid August, call the Cooperative Extension office in Sierra Vista for a map.

* Saturday, September 15 from 9 a.m.—2 p.m. at the U of A South. The Cochise County Master Gardeners Association will be hosting the Fall Garden Fair. A terrific place to buy plants after you go on the tour the weekend before! Visit their website for more information www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg or call the Cooperative Extension Office in Sierra Vista.

* The next regular meeting of Cochise County Master Gardeners Association will be September 5 at the Sierra Vista Library.

* Got bugs? The University of Arizona Department of Entomology’s Insect Identification Line can be reached at (520) 621-5925. E-mail queries can be sent to

bugman@ag.arizona.edu

If you want a bug identified, you will need to bring the bug to the main UA campus in Tucson.

Can I Use My Graywater?

Before using your graywater, check with your local governing body to ensure there are no additional requirements in place.

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) has recently issued new regulations for all types of reclaimed water.

Those regulations include new guidelines for the use of residential graywater. If you would like a copy of the new regulations you can contact ADEQ at 1-800-234-5677. Written in non-technical terms, the regulations make it very simple and affordable for the resident to use graywater, saving money and our valuable water.

These new graywater regulations were effective January 1, 2001. For more information call the Cochise County Health Department Environmental Specialist at (520) 452-4950.

*Cado Daily
WaterWise*

Garden Tip 8704 Update

BLADPODs have turned out to be a popular topic. I have received more feedback on this article than any other Garden Tip I have written. Many thanks to those who provided comments and ideas.

I received a tip for those of you who use boxed wines that come in the “squeeze and squirt” bladder. Although you can’t adjust the flow by turning a valve, I was informed by one reader that you can adjust the flow by sticking a toothpick in the opening of these containers. Many thanks for that suggestion.

BLADPODs do not always completely drain if they are not placed on a slope. A solution to this problem is to place the filled BLADPOD inside a 5 gallon nursery container and pull the valve stem out of one of the drain holes on the bottom edge of the pot. You can improve on this idea even further by cutting around the drain hole with a pair of heavy duty shears to make it large enough to pull the entire valve collar through the hole.



U-Pick Season

The U-Pick season is in full swing in southeastern Arizona. Experience a day on the farm and bring home Arizona’s finest and freshest produce. Many varieties of fruits and vegetables as well as honey, jellies, nuts, wine, and several varieties of meats will be available. For information stop by the Cooperative Extension offices for a brochure or send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Willcox Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture, Attn: Produce Brochure, 1500 N. Circle I Rd., Willcox, AZ 85643 or call 1-800-200-2272.

K eep a green tree in your heart and perhaps the singing bird will come.

The Agent's Observations

Q I was reading some gardening catalogs and noticed a symbol for the All American Award Winners. What does this mean? Are these award winning plants good for our area?

A According to their website — “the All-America Selections was incorporated May 14, 1948. The purposes of the corporation are: 1. To foster the development, production and distribution of new and better horticultural and agricultural varieties, species, strains and kinds in and for North America; 2. To foster the establishment and maintenance of trial grounds, test and demonstrations gardens in the United States of America, in Canada and in other locations, for the purpose of testing, judging, rating and demonstrating new and disseminating varieties, species, strains and kinds and acquainting the people with the most worthy varieties, species, strains and kinds and their uses, as and when they are ready for introduction; and 3. To award, recommend and publicize new varieties, species, strains and kinds of sufficiently high standards, according to their general or sectional adaptation, use and perfection, as found in the

All-America Selections trial grounds and test gardens.” (From: <http://www.all-americaelections.org/>)

As stated above, cultivars are tested throughout the United States and Canada, but there is not a test garden in Arizona. There is a show garden on the Arizona State University Campus, Tempe, AZ. This is the only one in the Southwest. There are no testing gardens in the Southwest. So All-American Award Winners are a place to start for trying new cultivars, but have limited testing in the Southwest.

Q What are these red fuzzy bugs that are climbing on my lawn? They have white markings on their backs and eight legs and are from 1/8th to nearly a 1/2 inch long. Do they harm my ornamental plants?

A These “bugs” are really spider mites. They should not be confused with velvet ants that are showing up now also. Spider mites are not bugs but rather arachnids or members of the spider family which have four pairs of legs, two body parts, no antenna and piercing, sucking mouth parts. These are the largest spider mites in our area.

Most spider mites are quite small and a hand lens is needed to even see and identify them.

Control: The red spider mite is a general feeder and usually does not cause excessive damage on plants. If they do, you can destroy them by stepping on them or spraying with insecticidal soap.

Q I have two things growing on my lawn. One is a black material that feels greasy when I touch it. It is on the ground and also on the blades of grass. The other material is orange-white in color and is moist to the touch, but dries out and is chalky the next day. Any ideas of what these things are?

A Did you change your oil over your lawn? If not then the black substance is a slime mold that is dormant in the soil until large amounts of moisture fall on the ground. During the rainy season the environmental conditions are then right for this organism to reproduce and migrate. The other material is a spore mat of a fungus that is in the soil. Again when environmental conditions are right the fungal organism, which lives in the soil, will send up a reproductive structure to spread spores.

Control: There is nothing that

(Continued on back page)

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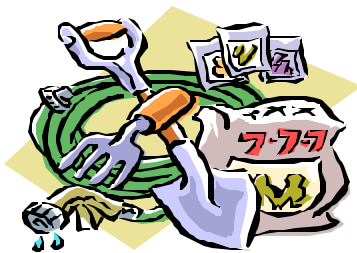
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needs to be done to control these organisms. They have been in the soil all along and because of favorable environmental conditions have produced reproductive structures. As the ground and air dry out they will disappear only to reappear when the environmental conditions are right.

Robert E. Call



Planting Pointers

To avoid dirt under your fingernails, rub them against a bar of soap before beginning garden work.

Make plant markers out of old ice-pop or craft sticks, and coat them with clear fingernail polish to make them weatherproof.

Make a handy depth gauge for planting by painting rings an inch apart on the handle of a garden trowel.

Sow small seeds like carrot or lettuce with a salt shaker for more even distribution.

Keep a set of measuring cups and spoons near garden supplies to take the guesswork out of measuring insecticides, weed killers, or other chemicals.

Line a clay or plastic flowerpot with a coffee filter before filling the pot with potting soil. The filter prevents the soil from going through the drainage holes.

To test if older seeds are still viable, place a small sampling between two sheets of damp paper towel and put them in a warm spot for five to ten days. If 3/4 of the seeds sprout, the seeds are okay.