



## The Virtual Gardener—Gardening by Computer

With the return of warm weather, gardening activities are ramping up. It's time to think about fertilizing, spraying for weeds, and of course watering. Soon we will be entering that long, hot, pre-monsoon season when careful attention to watering is extremely important. There are lots of things to keep track of, and if you're like me, it's easy for stuff to slip through the crack. What's a gardener to do?

Many gardeners keep notebooks or written journals containing plans, schedules, and notes on what they have done in the garden, when they did it, and what the results were. That's a great technique, but it's not for me. I've tried it and inevitably the notebook gets lost or left out in the rain, or I just forget to use it. Enter my computer. It sits on my desk, is never taken out in the rain, is used every day, and contains some great tools to stay organized.

Microsoft Outlook® is my organizing tool of choice. I like Outlook because it not only handles my e-mail but has great calendaring and journaling capabilities as well. I also like its capability to pop up nagging messages like, "Water the tomatoes!" Here's how I use it.

My gardening tasks fall into two categories. Some are repetitive tasks that can be placed on a schedule and others are one-time or as-required tasks that can't be placed on a schedule. Repetitive tasks include watering, fertilizing, and spraying for weeds.

I don't use an automated irrigation system, so I have to manually keep track of when and where to water. The vegetable garden and potted plants in my oasis area require frequent watering. Desert-adapted trees in the arid zone only require supplemental irrigation two or three times a year. Plants in the transition zone have varying water requirements, ranging from a drink once a week to a drink once a month. I set up recurring watering "appointments" for all these plants in Outlook and color code them as blue. I also ask Outlook to notify me when a watering "appointment" is due.

Using a similar approach I set up "appointments" for fertilizing (color coded green) and applying herbicides (color coded red). I could probably create appointments for other gardening tasks as well, but these three categories are sufficient for my needs.

Now, I hear you ask, "What if I don't

*(Continued on page 2)*

### Inside this issue:

May Reminders	2
Did You Know . . .	2
In a Desert Garden	2
Grow it All	4
Cuttings 'N' Clippings	4
Agent's Observations	5
Keep Insects at Bay	6

### Cochise County Cooperative Extension

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use Outlook?”

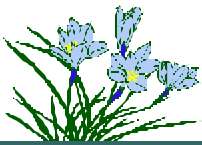
There are many other calendar-ing programs you can use that are free or cost very little. For example, Google has a calendar ([www.google.com/calendar](http://www.google.com/calendar)) that works very much like Outlook and will send you e-mail reminders. Yahoo also has a free calendar ([calendar.yahoo.com/](http://calendar.yahoo.com/)) you can use. In both cases, you need to create accounts before you can begin using the calendars.

Before I sign off this month, I'd like to share a great website with you. The site

([fireflyforest.com/flowers/](http://fireflyforest.com/flowers/)) is titled *Southeastern Arizona Wildflowers and the Plants of the Sonoran Desert* and contains a stunning collection of flower images as well as plant descriptions, all organized by flower color. Check it out! You'll be glad you did.

Until next time, happy surfing.

Gary A. Gruenhagen, Master Gardener  
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## May Reminders

- ◆ Deep water
- ◆ Plant warm season crops
- ◆ Check tree ties
- ◆ Control pests
- ◆ Control weeds (*Controlling Weeds*—a bulletin available from the Cooperative Extension)

## Did You Know . . .

May 3 through 9 is National Wildflower Week. This is the time to celebrate nature's bounty of wildflowers around the nation. The first National Wildflower Week was launched in 1988 as the primary focus of the American Wildflower Society, which was founded the same year. A few years later the American Wildflower Society became defunct and the week languished in obscurity until revived by Charles Spencer to honor his mentor, Edward Piela, naturalist and botanist.

To find out if there is a wildflower event happening in your neighborhood visit the National Organizations Directory at:

<http://www.wildflower.org/organizations/>

Here you'll find all kinds of information including the latest edition of the Native Plants Database where you can explore the 7,099 native plants listed or Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower collection of 24,185 plant images.

The national forests, national parks, national wildlife refuges, grasslands, and millions of acres of public lands are truly America's wildflower gardens.

**Source:** Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center at the University of Texas at Austin web site:

<http://www.wildflower.org/nww/>

*Robert E. Call*

Robert E. Call  
Area Horticulture Agent  
Carolyn Gruenhagen  
Editor

## In a Desert Garden

### Desert Bluebells – *Phacelia campanularia*



This is the cutest little annual with dark blue, bell-shaped flowers, dark green leaves, edged in deep red. On my first visit to Tohona Chul Park in Tucson shortly after I moved to this part of the world, I saw these charming little plants for sale in their nursery and I bought a whole tray of them. I knew they were annuals but I counted on them to self-seed themselves. Well it didn't happen and I only enjoyed them for one season, but I still thought it was well worth the expense. A few years later Diamond J.K. Nursery had these little plants for sale at the High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference and I bought a few of them and put them in a different location in my yard. Well, they lasted the spring and I loved their performance, but again the next year, nothing—not a single one came up. This time I gave up and didn't buy any more the next season and didn't put out any seeds either. Plants are so amazing, I guess the situation in my yard was not to their liking and the seeds lay dormant.

This winter we had nice rain-falls, probably more than any

(Continued on back page)

## Cochise County—Grow it All

One of the common questions the Master Gardeners are asked is: “What kind of veggies can I grow around here?” Well, as far as growing vegetables, and fruit, we're pretty lucky here in South-eastern Arizona. Most of us live at elevations between 3,500 and 5,500 feet, which classifies us as USDA Zone 8 (Sunset Magazine Zone 10). That means nice, long, warm summers and, really, pretty mild winters. It's easy to raise vegetables year around in a climate like ours and we can grow most anything.

Our summers are long and warm enough to raise things that folks in the short-summer northern climates really can't, say, watermelons, muskmelons and cantaloupes, sweet potatoes, even peanuts. Heck, if you get your tomato plants in the ground in late March or April, and provide some frost protection for the occasional cold nights that can occur after that, you can harvest home grown, TASTY tomatoes from June through October. Try that in Minnesota or Iowa! If you elect to wait for warmer, and less windy, days and don't plant until late June, your harvests can still run from August through October. Other summer crops include peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, beans, winter squash and pumpkins, zucchini, and corn.

In late summer, plant cool season crops like peas, beets, cabbage, lettuces, greens, broccoli, and carrots. With a little frost protection, like floating row covers or even a greenhouse, you can plant and harvest all winter long. In October or November, plant onions, garlic, leeks and shallots

and—with no frost protection whatsoever except a layer of mulch to protect the roots themselves—you'll harvest nice crops in May or June. Many of the cool season crops can also be planted in spring for early summer harvest.

Even artichokes can be successfully grown here. Our artichoke plant grew nicely last year—it was planted as a young, store-bought, potted plant last summer—it gave us three nice artichokes. Furthermore, it survived the winter looking just a little bit ragged and has quadrupled in size to two feet tall and three feet wide since early March. We're thinking this summer will yield a real nice crop of 'chokes.

Easily grown perennials include horseradish and asparagus. An asparagus patch will produce for fifteen or twenty years. Horseradish is so vigorous that it must be well contained or it'll spread like wild-fire. Plant some and you'll always be ready for prime rib.

Fruit and nut trees do well here, too; the Willcox area has abundant commercial fruit and nut orchards. Apricots, nectarines, plums, peaches, pomegranates, apples, cherries, pears, almonds, pecans, and pistachios all can be grown in our high desert. Sometimes a late

frost will nip the tender buds and that year's crop will suffer, but there's always next year. As a bonus, the fruit and nut tree blooms are spectacular. While citrus trees aren't recommended, some people successfully grow dwarf citrus varieties in large pots and bring the pots indoors during the winter to defeat the cold.

Small fruits like raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, and grapes also grow nicely here. Heck, just look at the many wineries around Sonoita and Elgin. Wine grapes are a commercial crop in our back yard! Even unusual fruits like kiwis and figs are possibilities. Don't try blueberries, though, our alkaline soils just won't support these acid-loving shrubs.

Herbs are another easy-to-grow crop. In our herb garden, thyme, parsley and chives survived the coldest nights of last winter. Plant summer herbs like basil and oregano in spring for summer use. Even an exotic like Lemongrass can be grown. We started ours from a couple of stalks purchased at the grocery store. We rooted them in a glass of water, then put them in the ground. They're a huge clump of grass now, three

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(Grow it All continued from page 3)

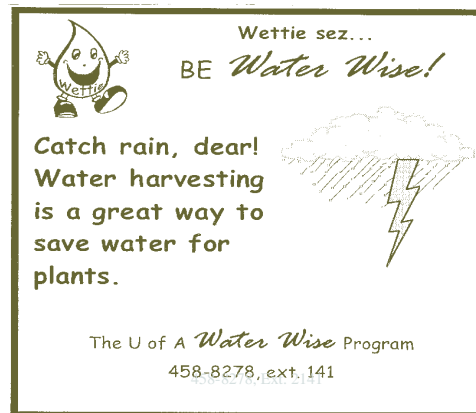
feet high and wide, coming up on their third straight summer. The upper part suffers in winter, but come warm weather, just trim off the browned parts of the leaves and the lemongrass will explode out of the ground. It's a wonderful plant, decorative and tasty. It also works as a potted plant.

So there you go! Our neck of the woods is a great place to

grow lots of edible things. There's good growing information available for free in the *Arizona Master Gardener Manual*, accessible online at:

<http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/mg/>. Alternatively, go to the library or book store and get some general gardening books to get started. Then, go get your hands dirty and grow some food!

Bill Schulze, Master Gardener



## Cuttings 'N' Clippings

\* The next CCMGA meeting is 5:00 p.m. Thursday, **May 6**, at the University of Arizona South Campus Public Meeting Room. *Rock Art of the Huachuca and Agave Domestication by Ancient Americans*—a talk on ancient rock art of the Huachuca Mountains and surrounding areas. The speaker will be Mr. William Gillespie, an archeologist with the Coronado National Forest, USDA Forest Service. Because he also studies agaves as a food source among the ancient Americans, he will say a few words about ancient agave fields that prove that early inhabitants of Arizona farmed agaves.

\* The Sierra Vista Area Gardeners Club will have its annual spring plant sale from 8:00 a.m. to noon on **May 8** in Bisbee at Warren Park. There will be home-grown annuals, perennials, shrubs, trees, cacti, houseplants and garden-related items and seeds for sale. For more information call Jane at 457-3012

\* International Bird Day and Spring Festival will be held at the San Pedro House East of Sierra Vista on Saturday, **May 8**. Check out the books and gifts in their store open daily from 9:30 a.m.—4:30 p.m. The Friends of the San Pedro (FSPR) is a volunteer, non-profit, non-political organization providing support to the BLM in their stewardship of the National Conservation Area. Check out their web site at:

<http://www.sanpedroriver.org/fsprhome.shtml>

\* Sierra Vista's Public Works report that nearly 300 residents came out for Earth Day at Public Works. City customers recycled: 6.84 tons of electronics, 2.10 tons of metal, 2 tons of papers shredded, 1.64 tons of household hazardous waste, 35 gallons of fat, oil, grease, 26 tires, 19 car batteries, 4 boxes of compact fluorescent lights, and 9.72 tons of large, bulky items were collected and disposed of properly!

\* Sierra Vista's Farmers Market is open every Thursday from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. Bisbee's Farmers Market is now open from

8:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. on Saturdays. **Opening Dates for Other Farmers Markets:**

**April 30, May 1 – Elfrida Farmers Market** - Friday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday 8 a.m. to noon. At Elfrida Community Garden, NW of Chiricahua Community Health Center, 10566 Hwy 191 in Elfrida.  
**May 1 – St. David Farmers Market** – Saturday 9 a.m. to Noon at St. David School in St. David on Hwy 80.  
**May 2 – New Elgin Farmers Market at the Kief-Joshua Vineyards/Winery.** Sunday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., 370 Elgin Rd. in Elgin.  
**May 15 – Douglas Mercado (formerly Farmers Market)** – Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Raul Castro 10<sup>th</sup> Street Park, Douglas.



## The Agent's Observations

**Q** We would like to grow some vegetables to eat at home to supplement our current economic condition. How do I learn how to garden?

**A** The best way to learn is doing! Speaking with experienced gardeners is also helpful. Gardening is a great family activity. I learned to garden in an extended family garden that was almost half an acre (20,000 square feet) in size.

Growing plants is a mystery to some. Good gardeners learn to separate fact from fiction. Gardening is both a science and an art. It is important to spend time with their plants, learning to determine needs and growing conditions. Gardening success is proportional to the time your shadow is in the garden! The garden offers tasty food and is personally rewarding. Plants have several basic needs—they are light, proper temperatures, nutrients and water. Plants, unlike animals, make their own food. As a gardener, your task is to meet these needs because your plants are growing in a foreign environment. Most vegetable garden plants need at least six to eight hours of direct sunlight each day. If your garden area does not provide this, it will need to be moved.

Vegetable plants are divided into two groups: warm-season and cool-season types. Warm-season vegetables are those that do not survive cold temperatures. They produce a fruit that contains seeds we eat. A cool-season vegetable can survive freezing weather. The part of the plant that is consumed does not con-

tain seeds. We eat leaves, stems, or roots. Of course, there are exceptions. Sweet potatoes are a tuberous root and a warm-season plant. Peas contain seeds and they are cool-season plants.

Many gardeners struggle with the growing conditions in Southern Arizona. Spring can be hot, dry, and windy. Many experienced gardeners do not plant all of their garden plants during late May and June. The heat and wind are just too much. Our growing season is long enough to mature many warm-season crops when planted at the end of June and the first weeks of July. The first killing frost does not normally occur until the last week in October to the second week in November depending on location in Southern Arizona. With a little protection warm-season plant can live into December. Cool-season plants are best planted the last week of September and into October. The fall growing season is much more reliable than spring for growing cool-season vegetables. Many times spring is just too hot, dry, and windy. More information can be found in the publication, *Ten Steps to a Successful Vegetable Garden*, at:

<http://cals.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/az1435.pdf>. Contact an Extension Office for a hard copy of this publication.

**Q** We have several prickly pear cacti in our yard. They have yellowish and black crusty spots on them. Is this some type of disease? What can be done about this problem?

**A** Lesions on pads of prickly pear cacti (*Opuntia* species) may be caused by several different pests or environmental conditions. However, the most common pad spot on the Engelmann's prickly pear in the desert of Arizona is caused by a fungus described as a species of *Phyllosticta* (**photo 1**). The disease is found throughout the desert. Lesions are almost completely black (**photo 2**) because of the presence of small black reproductive structures called pycnidia produced on the surface of infected plant tissue. Spores produced within these reproductive structures are easily moved by wind blown rain or dripping water and infect new sites on nearby pads (**photo 3**). Under moist conditions, the fungus grows within the pad from new infection sites. Pads on the lower part of plants are often most heavily infected since the humidity is higher and moisture often persists after rain. Once pads dry, the fungus becomes inactive and the lesions may fall out or become unattached as the plant tissue heals. Severely infected pads or entire plants should be removed from landscapes to prevent spread of the fungus. No other controls are recommended.

**Source:**

[http://ag.arizona.edu/PLP/plpext/diseases/native/opuntia/opuntia\\_aphylo.html](http://ag.arizona.edu/PLP/plpext/diseases/native/opuntia/opuntia_aphylo.html)

*Robert E. Call*  
Area Horticulture Agent

## Spring Xeriscape Garden Tour

On Sunday, May 2 the Spring Xeriscape Tour will take place from 1:00—4:00 p.m. It will be a walking tour in the Mesa Verde Estates, Sierra Vista. For a map email [jwilliam@ag.arizona.edu](mailto:jwilliam@ag.arizona.edu). For more information, see the flyer on the Master Gardener Web Site

[www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/](http://www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/)



(*Phacelia campanularia* continued from page 2) other year since I've been living here and guess what? The other day, I went on a little inspecting tour through my yard and low and behold there it was—a tiny dark blue bell was looking up at me, and another one, too. How wonderful! My little plant has finally decided to peek out into this world.

The plants are no more than six inches tall with the flowers being about an inch across. I went to the Sonoran Desert Museum a few weeks ago and saw these plants there too, but they were much taller than the ones in my yard. I checked the books and there are several species of *Phacelia*, all being annuals.

The variety in my yard is native to California, but has naturalized across Arizona. Seeds are available in some catalogs.

Angel Rutherford, Master Gardener

### Keep Insects at Bay with Non-toxic Methods

- ✿ Wipe up ants with a wet sponge when you see them. They rely on one another for direction.
- ✿ To keep ants out, sprinkle powdered red chili pepper, paprika, or dried peppermint where ants are coming in.
- ✿ If flies are pestering you, scrape a lemon or orange and allow the citrus oil to permeate the room. Place citrus oil pomanders by the doors too. Flies avoid the smell.
- ✿ Mosquitoes don't like vinegar. Dip a cotton ball in some vinegar and rub it on exposed skin. The vinegar evaporates immediately, so there's no chance of you and your loved ones smelling like pickles.
- ✿ Food storage pests can be a big problem in our climate. They usually enter through contaminated groceries. Try not to load up on dry goods unless you can seal them very tightly.



- ✿ Want more peace of mind? Roaches do not transmit human disease, but they are disgusting and dirty. Try this non-toxic roach trap: Soak a rag in beer and place it in a shallow dish in an invested area overnight. In the morning, it's easy to dispose of the drunken roaches.
- Source:** Southern Arizona Home Builders Association (SAHBA)