



Master Gardener Newsletter

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Cooperative Extension Service
US Department of Agriculture
College of Agriculture & Home Economics

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NEW TECHNIQUE THINS EXCESS BLOSSOMS AND BOOSTS TREE FRUIT SIZE

Too many flowers on peach and apple trees are not necessarily a good thing. If all of the flowers that formed in springtime were allowed to become fruit, the resulting crop may be large, but the fruit would be excessively small and unmarketable. Larger fruit commands a higher market price.

Today, U.S. fruit growers are spending up to \$500 per acre to hand-remove excess blossoms, at a total annual cost of more than \$156 million. It's a tedious and time-consuming process — often used in peach production — and it, like chemical fruit thinning, may be ineffective as well as expensive.

That's why Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists have been working on a more efficient way to reduce the number of blossoms on a tree to promote more profitable fruit. ARS is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's chief scientific research agency.

At the ARS Appalachian Fruit Research Laboratory in Kearneysville, W. Va., plant physiologist Thomas Tworkoski and horticulturist Stephen Miller have experi-

mented with using an essential oil plant extract to reduce the number of blossoms on a tree, allowing more profitable fruit to grow. Adopting such an environmentally sound approach to blossom thinning would prevent limb breakage from excess fruit weight, while yielding the larger fruit many consumers prefer.

The new method involves spraying fruit trees with the natural plant product while the tree is in bloom. The plant extract damages the blossoms' reproductive tissues and prevents pollination and fertilization. Flowers are sufficiently affected shortly after treatment. The concentration of essential oil plant extract determines the degree of blossom fall. Tworkoski and Miller are fine-tuning the timing of application with the bloom cycles of various fruit trees including apples, peaches, pears and other high-value fruit trees.

No only can this method meet the tree fruit industry's needs for reliable blossom thinners that are safe and environment-friendly, it may also be acceptable for use in organic fruit production. A patent application has been submitted for this technology and ARS is looking for cooperative research partners to assist with small field trials.

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Master Gardener Meetings
Wednesday
January 16, 2008
February 20, 2008
 See you there !!!

ORANGE-FLESHED HONEYDEWS EVALUATED

A team of Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists has evaluated the merits of melons that combine the best attributes of cantaloupes and honeydew melons.

The team has been searching for new ways to solve organic and conventional melon growers' number one concern: food safety, according to plant physiologist Gene Lester, in the ARS Crop Quality and Fruit Insects Research Unit in Weslaco, Texas.

Cantaloupes, also known as muskmelons, have sometimes tested positive for *Salmonella lignieres* and *Escherichia coli* O157:H7. That's because potentially harmful microbes can readily lodge in the fruit's rough, netted skin and defy sanitation measures.

When netted melons are cut, any harmful microbes—hiding in crevices on the exterior surface and covered by naturally-forming biofilms that protect them from sanitizers — can be transferred to the inner flesh.

The team compared "netted" cantaloupes—the type bearing orange-fleshed fruit with deep-green rind and netlike outer markings— with a phytonutrient-dense, but nonnetted, melon genotype. They found that the smooth-skinned melons are less likely to harbor bacteria.

The smooth-skinned, orange-fleshed melons are also being evaluated for their flavor. One such melon, Orange Dew, is being grown organically in limited quantities in the United States. It has beaten the netted Cruiser cantaloupe in a taste test. That's because Orange Dew has a Brix score— a measurement of sweetness— of 11 to 14, compared to 9 for most cantaloupes. Sweetness has been shown to be the most important taste factor in repeat purchase of melons.

The orange-fleshed honeydews store well, too-for around three weeks, compared to 10-14 days for a typical netted cantaloupe kept in simulated commercial retail storage conditions.



AN INVITATION FOR MASTER GARDENERS

FROM SIERRA VISTA GROWERS

Sierra Vista Growers is happy to extend a 10% discount for Master Gardeners on plants and supplies purchased at our nursery. We offer an extensive variety of trees, shrubs, native plants, bedding plants, house plants and gardening supplies. We are located at 2800 NM Hwy 28, La Union, NM. Our hours are Monday, - Saturday, 9-5. For December and January, we are closed on Sundays, but the rest of the year we are open 11-5. Please bring Master Gardener identification along. We look forward to meeting you.

Sierra Vista Growers is hiring for the season and we would love to have knowledgeable Master Gardeners working here. We need people who are comfortable selling to the public, answering questions, both in person and over the phone. Bilingual and cashier experience is helpful. Some Weekend work is required, flexible with part time or full time hours. Contact Mary Reisenauer, Sierra Vista Growers 575-874-2415, or FAX your resume to 575-589-3024.

13th WATER CONSERVATION XERISCAPE CONFERENCE TO BE HELD FEBRUARY 2008

David Salman—Chief Horticulturist for SF Greenhouses, expert in xeric and western landscaping/plant selection.

Cheryl Barton—Landscape Architect, MLA Harvard, recipient of 2003-2004 Rome Prize.

Charles Mann—Free lance photographer specializing in garden and horticultural images.Plans are about completed for the 13th Water Conservation/Xeriscape Conference. The Conference is February 21 and 22, 2008 at the Albuquerque Pyramid Marriott. The Expo will be a 2 day event, February 23 and 24, 2008 at the Albuquerque Expo at the Fairgrounds—Lujan Building.

You can register at www.xeriscapenm.com—it's not too early right now!

The Conference will focus on Water, Art and the Environment with essentially a day devoted to environmental issues and a day to art and the landscape. Senator Jeff Bingaman, legislative schedule permitting, will open the conference.



JANUARY GARDEN TIPS

By Dixie La Rock

Happy New Year to all!

FLOWERS

- Plant corms of gladiolus and dahlias this month.
- Sow seeds of spring and summer annuals indoors now for transplant outdoors in a couple of months.
- Plan new plantings. Order seeds and garden doo dads.
- Plant and tend pansies, stock and other winter annuals. Keep them watered and dead headed.

FRUIT, NUTS, SHADE TREES AND SHRUBS

- Plant bare root, balled and burlap and container grown specimens. Bare root plants should become available soon and must be planted before they break dormancy.
- Time for dormant season pruning. Remove dead, crossing, diseased and damaged limbs.
- Use horticulturally sound pruning practices leaving branch collars when removing limbs.
- Don't "top" trees.
- Wait to prune stone fruit trees and spring flowering shrubs.
- Vigorous shrubs such as photinia and ligustrum may be pruned by 30% while junipers by no more than 20% at one time.
- Clean up crepe myrtles and oleanders by removing seed heads.
- Spray deciduous trees and shrubs prone to insect damage with dormant oil.
- Deep water established

trees, shrubs and succulents once a month during winter.

VEGETABLES

- Plant cool season crops such as carrots, onions, parsnips, radishes, English peas, snow peas, fava beans, garbanzo beans, lettuces and other green leafy vegetables after mid month.
- Start seeds of summer vegetables indoors then transplant outdoors when threat of frost has passed.

LAWNS

- Relax- warm season grasses are dormant and cool season grasses are quiet; no need to mow or fertilize.
- Water lawns at least once a month; twice a month may be preferable depending on soil type, temperature, wind, rain and quality of turf desired.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Turn over garden beds adding organic matter.
- Add extra mulch to established plantings and seed beds.
- Control weeds before they set seed.



DEAD HEAD WE MUST

Deadheading is not simply a matter of keeping things neat. When you remove spent flowers promptly after they bloom, you direct the energy of the plant away from seed making. Most annuals (asters are an exception) will, when deadheaded, use that energy to bloom and bloom, since making seeds in their whole mission in life. The more you thwart them, the harder they try. And don't wait until the blossoms look tired. As a general rule, annual flowers signal "mission accomplished" shortly after they're pollinated, so you get the longest season of bloom if you cut lots of bouquets.

It does pay to let a few seeds form, many annuals will self-sow for next year, among them nigella, alyssum, nicotiana, calendula, cleome, larkspur, and poppies. (From: New York Times 1000 Gardening Questions & Answers.)

A Tomato In Winter

Part of the garden has come indoors for the winter. Being potted and pampered is apparently working – their color is good and they are blooming. Yet to be proven is their ability to set and mature fruit with limited sun exposure.

This venture actually began late last winter with a few seedlings that I got from George – yea that George. He started these Oregon Spring Bush Tomatoes and gave me some. I planted two in a garden bed and two in a pot that I kept on the back porch. My first experiment with outdoor potted tomatoes was successful.

The Oregon Spring Bush Tomato is a determinant – grows to size, blooms and produces fruit – but will produce a second crop in the fall if pruned back and fertilized. Since tomatoes are perennials in warmer winter climates, they will also grow again from the rootstock, bloom and set fruit if protected from freezing temperatures.

I started a second planting last summer, from seed that I saved and transplanted two plants in a large pot for winter. The plants are now (Jan08) about as tall as the potted ones that I grew outside last spring – 24”, and are full of promise.

Oregon Spring Bush Tomato

The variety was developed at Oregon State University to bloom, set and mature fruit in cool nighttime temperatures. The fruit are mid-sized, red and firm when mature with a favorable acidic/sweetness balance. Mine also bloomed and set fruit last year without any noticeable blossom drop right through late spring and early summer (hot days and warm nights). It is one of the earliest producing tomatoes along with Early Girl and Better Boy, and has a similar flavor.

Two Plants - One Pot - Two Problems



Cracking - Oregon Spring Bush

Last year I grew two plants in one pot, which complicated maintaining the correct amount of water in the fruit. Because of the difference in root mass between the two plants, the fruit on one was prone to splitting (too much water) while fruit on the other was prone to blossom end rot (too little water) – an unexpected demonstration of the relationship between soil moisture and fruit problems.

If you are interested in early tomatoes without a greenhouse – I expect ripe fruit in early March – try over-wintering an Oregon Spring Bush Tomato in a sunny area. They are proven pot tolerant, cold tolerant, short day tolerant, will bloom in mid winter and make a delightful houseplant – all that and fruit to boot.

Planting Schedules Winter Indoor Tomatoes

- Start seeds – July/August
- Move indoors – Before first hard frost (move indoors over night when below 40F)
- Move outdoors – After last frost (move indoors over night when below 40F)

Early Spring Tomatoes

- Start Seed – January
- Pot up under grow lights until early March
- Plant out with “walls-o-water” – March (harden them off for a couple of weeks first)
- Remove “walls-o-water” – mid April (last frost) and cover with lightweight row covers*
- Remove row covers – July

Pot Size – about 5 gallons and at least 12 inches deep Caution – pots need to be shaded from summer sun or double potted to maintain cool soil temperatures

*Row covers protect plants from leafhoppers and spring winds. They also create a slightly higher humidity for the plants.

Till next time,

Darrol Shillingburg – January 2008

Doña Ana Extension Master Gardener



Summer Fruit - Oregon Spring Bush



Blossom End Rot - Oregon Spring Bush



Oregon Spring Bush Tomatoes



Potted - Oregon Spring Bush



A GIFT THAT CONTINUES TO GIVE

By Dee Davis

DON'T THROW AWAY YOUR CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA! This is a plant you can grow outside all summer and bring inside in the fall to bloom again. By the time it has had a summer growth it will have increased in size considerably. (After all, they're trees in southern Mexico.) Here what you can do to have your very own poinsettia "bush" for next Christmas:

After your lovely plant stops blooming it may drop its leaves and look dead. Mine didn't, but this is a possibility. If it does drop its leaves, water infrequently and put the plant in a cool location with little, but some, light. In late April or early May-place it outside in a semi-shaded area.

Before doing this, repot with fresh soil in a container that's 2 to 3 inches larger. Begin regular watering again, as well as fertilizing occasionally with 20-20-20. From then on, give the plant a quarter turn every week to ensure even growth and just sit back and enjoy watching it grow. If you want a plant with many flowers, pinch out the growing shoots at 3 to 4 week intervals. This encourages branching. Some people like to cut the plant back to three to five stems. I don't do this. However, whichever method you choose, don't do any snipping, snapping, or trimming later than September. Otherwise, you may not have blooms for Christmas. You'll note the poinsettia, being of the Euphorbia family, will produce sap when cut. This is a harmless substance but could cause an allergic reaction for those who are latex-sensitive.

When fall comes, and temps hover in the 55- to 60-degree range, gently wash the poinsettia down with a garden hose, check for pests and diseases, spray with insecticidal soap if you wish, and bring the poinsettia indoors to a sunny spot.

Around late September or early October, flower initiation begins and they'll mature 60 to 85 days from that point. To do this, though, poinsettias need long, dark periods, without which they'll continue to produce leaves and will grow but won't flower. Even light from an electric bulb or street light will interfere with this process, so from September on cover your plant every day after 5 P.M. until 8 A.M. with a heavy paper bag, or opaque black cloth, or place it in a dark closet. However, each morning bring it into full sunlight for the day. Do this until December 15th. About then you'll probably see bracts starting to show color and you can eliminate the cover. Temps should be cool

at night and not more than 70 degrees during the day.

Poinsettias love humid conditions, so mist your "little beauty" frequently but let the soil dry out between watering. Be conservative with watering because they'll get root rot if there's excessive water at the roots or water standing in a saucer. The poinsettia I received as a gift three years ago has endured three repottings and is now the size of a small bush. Like mine, your Christmas gift can continue to give you pleasure for years to come.

Master Gardener Profile: Joan Lane

By Ann Palormo



Joan Lane and her husband Jim have been living and gardening in Las Cruces for three years. They moved here from southern California where they owned and operated a landscape installation and maintenance company. Here they own a company that sells agricultural products.

The Lanes live on one and a quarter acres on the West Mesa in the hills above the KOA RV park. Most of it is in native vegetation.

An active gardener for 30 years, Joan likes to grow both vegetables and flowers. She signed up for the Master Gardener program to learn about the unique character of the New Mexico landscape.

Joan recalls that at one point in her life she was responsible for 87 acres of landscape in Newport Beach, CA. She had a problem with deer eating the flowers in the flower beds and called the local extension service for suggestions. She was advised to use lion dung to discourage the deer so she called Lion Country, a wild animal park in the area, and spoke with someone in the "Lion Dung Department." They shipped 30 pounds of lion dung via UPS, putting it on the truck on a Friday evening. It was delivered on a Monday morning in July. Joan says the expression of the UPS guy was priceless when she told him what he was delivering to her.

Interests beyond gardening include photography, stitching and RV-ing. She and her husband Jim have six children between them, six grandchildren and 2 ½ great-grandchildren (one is on the way). She reminds everyone that plants need water in the winter.

Master Gardener Matters

As most of you know, John White has taken a new position at the Chihuahua Desert Garden located at the Centennial Museum on UTEP's campus. John is enjoying his new position. He says that now he gardens instead of administers as he has been working in the garden daily doing typical beginning of the year garden chores. You will be able to visit with him at our next meeting February 20 as he has agreed to speak about the garden then. Fortunately, even though he is busy in his new job, he has been willing to meet with several of us as we try to handle some of his former duties.

At least until John's replacement is hired, and possibly afterwards, we have agreed to coordinate the Master Gardener program. Others from the Extension Office who will be helping us are Karim Martinez, Interim County Director; Rafa Realivasquez, Interim Agent; and Barbara Arispe. We'll also need all of you to keep us informed of what is going on and who is doing what so we can coordinate successfully.

In the future, we hope to use this space in the newsletter to update everyone who wasn't able to attend the meeting on what happened and what is going on the following month. At the January meeting, we will be organizing for the year so we hope to see you there. (Though it might be easier to volunteer you if you're not present!)

As you look at the calendar, you will see that there are many educational and volunteer opportunities available. You may also have your own ideas for projects, and your input is not only welcome, but vital to the program so please contact us. We look forward to working with all of you to maintain and improve the Master Gardener program in Dona Ana County.

Sincerely,

Barb and Juliet

Barb Sallach (bsallach@nmsu.edu) and Juliet Williams (jwx2@earthlink.net)



If you are an individual with a disability who is in need of an auxiliary aid or service to participate in an Extension activity, please contact John M. White at 505-6649 at least two weeks prior to the event.

Life after Extension

First, I would like to thank all the Master Gardeners for their dedication and commitment to the Dona Ana County Master Gardener Program through the years for some and for others it has only been a few months. You all have helped the program in some way, whether it be small or large. I hope with me gone, that you will continue to support the program and the new agent, and continue to grow the program. Maybe in my absence, you will even become a closer knit group with leaders being developed to continue the program.

Secondly, I would like to thank everyone that contributed or helped with the graduation gift, my retirement party gift, or just stopping by to drop off gifts or good-byes. I have truly enjoyed working with you and hope that in the future we will continue to cross paths.

Finally, I am trying to leave you with some form of leadership. I have asked Barb Sallach and Juliet Williams to work as co-coordinators during the interim period. Please give them the support they will need to keep everything running smooth. Mary Vee Cammack and Jeanine Castillo are also going to help as assistant coordinators with financial and management relations with the university. Rafa Realivasquez, DAC Ag Agent from the office, will be the agent filling in for my position working with the Master Gardeners. Karim Martinez has been named the interim DAC Extension Program Director and will be working with the overall running of the office. Please keep Rafa and Karim informed about what is happening with the Master Gardeners.

Now let me tell you a little about my new job. I am the assistant botanic garden curator for the UTEP Chihuahuan Desert Gardens located in the middle of campus. Wynn Anderson, the head botanic curator, is my boss. My job is to oversee the maintenance and development of the garden. I will have some outreach responsibilities as the Centennial Museum is a public facility and is the home to the Chihuahuan Desert Gardens. Leading tours, conducting educational events, developing a volunteer program, and working with the annual native plant sale will be part of the outreach program.

Again, thank you for allowing me to be your Master Gardener Program mentor and leader. If you ever need to get in touch with me or would like to donate some time in the garden, get in touch with me using the following contact information.

**John M. White
Assistant Botanic Curator
Chihuahuan Desert Gardens
UTEP Centennial Museum
500 W. University
El Paso, TX 79968-0533
(915) 747-5335**



January 2008



| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|-----|---|---|--|---|--|-----|
| |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 MG Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm Karen Gray (In) Linda Fredrickson | 16 Master Gardener Meeting 9 am to 11am Extension Office Hay Conference Ruidoso, NM | 17 | 18 MG Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm Pamela Crane Sharon Poindexter | 19 |
| 20 | 21 Extension Office CLOSED For Martin Luther/ King Holiday | 22 MG Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm Suzi Jones (In) | 23 | 24 | 25 MG Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm Ina Goldberg (In) Sarah Wood | 26 |
| 27 | 28 | 29 MG Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm Carolyn Standridge (In) Joann Embury | 30 | 31  | | |



February 2008



| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|---|
| | <p>Pecan Conference And Pecan Food Fantasy</p> <p>Is coming up!</p> <p>March 2-4, 2008</p> <p>Mark your Calendar!</p> | | | | <p>1 MG</p> <p>Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm Janet Brydon (In) Alberta Morgan</p> <p>Mastering Organic Certification Workshop Extension Office</p> | 2 |
| 3 | <p>4</p> <p>Chile Conference All Day Encanto Hotel Las Cruces, NM</p>  | <p>5 MG</p> <p>Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm Mary Reisenauer(In)</p> <p>Chile Conference All Day Encanto Hotel Las Cruces, NM</p> | 6 | 7 | <p>8 MG</p> <p>Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm</p> <p>Delfi Mondragon(In) Anne Shine-Ring</p> | 9 |
| <p>10</p>  | 11 | <p>12 MG</p> <p>Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm</p> <p>Karen Gray (In)</p> | 13 | <p>14</p>  | <p>15 MG</p> <p>Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm Pamela Crane (In) Sharon Poindexter</p> <p>High Desert Conference Sierra Vista, AZ</p> | 16 |
| 17 | <p>18</p> <p>Extension Office CLOSED For President's Day</p> | <p>19 MG</p> <p>Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm</p> <p>Katrin Sumpter(In) Linda Fredrickson</p> | <p>20</p> <p>Master Gardener Meeting</p> <p>9 am to 11 am</p> <p>Extension Office</p> | <p>21</p> <p>Xeriscape Conference</p>  | <p>22 MG</p> <p>Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm Melissa Choate (In) Sarah Woods</p> <p>Xeriscape Conference</p> | <p>23</p> <p>Xeriscape Conference Expo</p> |
| <p>24</p> <p>Xeriscape Conference Expo</p> | 25 | <p>26 MG</p> <p>Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm</p> <p>Lauren Bishop (In) Jo Embury</p> | 27 | <p>28</p> <p>National Fiery Food & BBQ Conference Albuquerque, NM</p> | <p>29 MG</p> <p>Telephone Hotline Extension Office 9 am to 1 pm</p> <p>National Fiery Food & BBQ Conference Albuquerque, NM</p> <p>2008 NM Organic Farming Conference Albuquerque, NM</p> | <p>National Fiery Food & BBQ Conference Albuquerque, NM Through March 2</p> <p>2008 NM Organic Farming Conference Albuquerque, NM</p> |