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June Garden, Photo by Ann Guthals

# Yellowstone Master Gardener



NEWSLETTER

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## Meet Master Gardener Shelley Thurmond

by Sheri Fredericksen

Shelley Thurmond was born and raised in Billings. She graduated from Montana State University in 1985 with a BS degree in chemical engineering. She moved to Idaho to work at the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory, where she met her husband, Paul. Shelley and her husband moved back to Billings in 1999, settling near Huntley, and purchased a home including undeveloped acreage.

Shelley's first introduction to growing plants was around age 5. Her mother gave her a package of blue Bachelor Button seeds and showed her how to plant them. When Shelley looked at the seeds in her tiny hand, she was amazed at their structure – they looked like little rabbit feet! Shelley was so surprised that when the tiny seeds she had planted grew and bloomed, they looked just like the package!

The gardening challenges at their home are having neither municipal nor well water, with dry, sandy soils and hungry wildlife (mainly deer, rabbits, voles, marmots and grasshoppers). Shelley said she only grows flowers that the deer and rabbits won't bother much, such as goldenrod, iris, salvia, veronica, globe thistle, and coneflower. She said that she's currently trying to grow more native plants at home and if some happen to "volunteer," she encourages their growth. Any watering is with water delivered to their cisterns. Shelley and her husband tried to have a well drilled, but after 320 feet and no water in sight, they stopped drilling. They hope to try again in a more promising location.

Shelley learned not to waste her time trying to grow vegetables at her home — veggies are too juicy and tempting to the wildlife. She rents a plot at St. Andrew community garden to grow vegetables. St. Andrew's "mission garden" is where she does most of her volunteer hours for the Master Gardener program. She also enjoys watching wildlife, and counts birds for "citizen scientist" programs.



She said that in the dry months following the dormancy of the cool season grasses she has found a different kind of beauty in her surroundings. After mid-summer's heat, the landscape

(Continued on page 3)

# Welcome to Our New Extension Agent!

by Ann McKean

Yellowstone County has a new Horticultural Extension Agent and Yellowstone County residents are extremely lucky to have him. **Anthony Sammartano** brings a huge amount of experience working with the environment to the position. Big picture thinking shows how Anthony moves through the world and approaches new projects.

Anthony Sammartano grew up surrounded by national forests in Castaic, California. He graduated from Humboldt State, (now California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt) with a degree in Restoration Ecology. His studies taught him how to restore disturbed landscapes through an ecosystem model. He has worked on watershed protection in Colorado, invasive species and restoration in California and has taken an extensive plant and soil inventory in Nevada, falling evermore in love with the natural environment. After these experiences with plants and wildlife, he realized he wanted to share that joy with as many people as he could.

Anthony came to Billings through AmeriCorps with Big Sky Watershed Corps. After being alone in the Nevada wilderness, he learned how to talk to people again while working for the Corps. He also spent two and a half years at the Montana Audubon Center, after which he became the caretaker at Two Moon Park. Volunteering at the Seed Library, he also learned what a great resource it is. He still felt driven to share with more people about the natural world and applied for the Extension position. He brings an enormous amount of knowledge and passion all packaged in a calm, hardworking, patient, no-nonsense demeanor, driven by the joy of teaching.

Anthony has taken on a monumental task, the scope of which includes a dizzying range of responsibilities to commercial growers and homeowners alike. He serves over 180,000 people in Yellowstone County. He is our county extension agent for horticulture and our resource for questions about plants, diseases, and pests. He will also be creating and providing programs and classes. Anthony is also responsible for providing leadership to the Master Gardener program as we work toward our shared goal to (per his job description) ‘grow healthier landscapes and gardens that use resources appropriately and improve the



**Nice Socks, Anthony!**

quality of life and the ecosystem,’ and ‘share responsibility with other Extension staff in implementing and maintaining a balanced, interdisciplinary Extension program.’

Anthony’s goal is to leave a legacy of a healthier more sustainable and resilient world. He wants to help his community to view our world like an ecosystem, supporting our community as it moves in new directions. Anthony wants to demystify change and help us, through our love of the natural world, to understand that it is not an “All or Nothing” environment. The goal is to work with it and not against it. He believes we have so many

opportunities for growth on a personal and community level and he is grateful to be a part of that.

Anthony’s responsibilities are so vast that Extension decided to break them into two parts, so he had time to adjust without being completely inundated. He started as the County Horticulture Agent in April and will pick up the Master Gardener leadership in September. (Until then, please direct inquiries to Sarah.) He is very much looking forward to meeting and getting to know all of us and collaborating with us as we continue to grow into the best Master Gardeners we can be.

I am so excited to begin this new chapter in Yellowstone County as we work together.

I cannot wait for each and every Yellowstone County Master Gardener to meet this bright, knowledgeable, kind, and wonderful man. You are going to LOVE him!



# Yellowstone Master Gardeners CARE

by Mary Davis

Yellowstone Master Gardeners have been involved in the CARE after-school program for 20 years. From January to March 2024, eight Master Gardeners presented winter gardening lessons and projects for the students enrolled in the after-school programs at six elementary schools (about 250 children, the majority being first through third graders). We visited each of the six schools two times.

The first visit was about bulbs... learning about the parts of a tulip using a color-cut-paste-label “puzzle,” decorating half of a Styrofoam hamburger take-out container for drainage, planting purchased tulip bulbs (chilled since September) in four inch pots with donated soil, and making an origami tulip on a craft stick for an instant “bloom.”

The second visit (after getting feedback on how their tulips were doing after 5 weeks) was about seeds and cuttings... creating a bumblebee using black and yellow pipe cleaners with waxed paper wings, putting the bumblebee, soil, seeds and cuttings in a donated 32 ounce drink cup with dome lid making a terrarium, thumbing through seed catalogs cutting and pasting to make a collage of their “dream” garden, and creating a picture incorporating old seeds.

The students love their creations of these hands-on projects! They and the coordinators look forward to our visits. We often hear follow-up a year later on how the cuttings were re-potted and have become houseplants for the students and families. Yay!



CARE Academy is an out-of-school time program available to elementary school-age children (grades K-5). The program provides a place to relax, rest and stretch their bodies as well as their minds when they're not in the classroom. Activities include: academic assistance and educational games, physical activity (sports and age-appropriate games), and enrichment activities. Contact the CARE Academy Office 406-794-1468 .

## Meet Master Gardener Shelley Thurmond (cont.)

around her home may appear more brown than green overall, but is still very much alive, as is evidenced by the diversity of interesting wildlife and plants.

Shelley joined the MG program and completed Level 3 in 2012. She said she has “too many” houseplants. Her favorite indoor plants are a peace lily given to her by her mother-in-law, and an African violet that she’d given her mother-in-law, and was returned upon her passing.

Shelley enjoys going to end-of-season sales at local nurseries. Several years ago, she purchased a sea-lavender (*Limonium* genus) which she planted in her yard. Each year the blooms draw many pollinators and also make a beautiful dried floral arrangement. Shelley said it’s very satisfying to nurse a struggling and bedraggled perennial back to life before winter sets in. She encourages other gardeners to give “sad-looking” plants a second chance.



*Limonium platyphyllum* (Sea Lavender)



## SOIL BLOCKING

An ecological way to start plants for the garden

by Rayanne Schuler



In my quest to use less plastic in gardening, I found a video on soil blocking for plant starts, and thought I would give it a try. The idea is to use just soil and a blocking tool to plant and grow seeds in small blocks, no plastic cells to mess with.

There are numerous advantages:

- Roots don't curl around the inside of the cell trays, but instead are air pruned and the plant grows a substantial mass of roots within the block.
- The soil blocker has a dimple on top to place the seed, so it's easy to plant and cover the seeds quickly.
- Especially good for plants that don't like their roots disturbed.

This time I tried it on nasturtiums and zinnia seeds. I think it would also work well for starting things like lettuce, cucumbers and other veggies. It was a great success! You can find a lot of recipes online but this is what I used.

**Soil recipe**— Yield- 2 bushels, unit of measure 10 quart bucket

3 parts coconut coir (or peat)

2 parts coarse sand or perlite

1 part garden soil

2 parts compost

3 cups fertilizer (e.g. blood meal, colloidal phosphate and greensand; I used vermicompost)

1/2 cup of lime if needed

Moisten using 1 part water to 3 parts mix. Mix to a consistency of soft putty or wet cement until a small amount of water will ooze out when compressing. Add two inches of mix to a flat bottom tub (I used a 2" soil blocker but other sizes are available). Flat press the blocker into the soil in the tub until it's firmly packed. Then release the blocks onto trays with the plunger handle.

It is best to water the blocks from the bottom so I inserted an open tray into a slow draining tray to water. You could also use flat, clean Styrofoam meat trays. Let the seeds sprout in a cool dim area and there's not much additional watering before they sprout. When planting, the roots quickly acclimate into the surrounding soil, with minimal transplant shock.



# Malus: Let's Plant Some Apples!

By Ann McKean

Trees in the Malus genus are adaptable and tolerant of our challenging soil conditions and many varieties shrug off our cold weather, even requiring chill hours to set fruit. Although we can experience seasons with severe fireblight outbreaks when the conditions are just right, there are many tough varieties that resist the bacterial infection, offering us delicious, edible and beautiful ornamental varieties from which to choose. Some excellent heritage and modern fruiting varieties for the Yellowstone Valley include the Chestnut, Dolgo and Kerr crabapples, and full-sized Frostbite, Goodland, Haralson, Honeycrisp, and Sweet Sixteen. For a more complete list of recommended varieties with hardiness and disease resistance refer to the MSU Extension website.

Domestic apples hybridize freely. This means that seedlings do not come true, and grafting is required to produce a new tree if a particular variety is desired. Beware of trees grafted on extremely dwarfing rootstock; these rootstocks are less hardy than larger varieties. Local nurseries should be able to tell you if rootstock is dwarfing or not. Semi-dwarfing rootstocks are hardy enough for our area.

## Pollination

Most domestic apples require a second variety for cross pollination. One of the few exceptions is the Dolgo crabapple which, while able to produce apples without another pollinator, is usually more prolific with one. The Dolgo is also a fantastic pollinator for most other apple varieties. If there are no other apple or crabapple trees nearby, you will usually need to plant two trees in the Malus genus for fruit set.

## Ornamentals

Ornamental crabs are a great small tree for urban and suburban yards with the same adaptability as the rest of the Malus genus. With beautiful pollinator-benefitting spring blossoms, most ornamental crabs produce attractive (and bird friendly) fruit of varying sizes, including the many varieties that produce small persistent fruit which remains tidily on the tree well into winter. Spring Snow is a fruitless variety, but properly applied growth regulators such as Florel can safely render any crabapple fruitless.

While all ornamental crabapples have varying degrees of susceptibility to diseases, those risks are lower in our dry valley and there are many extremely resistant cultivars. Prairifire has high resistance to most diseases (and drought!) and sports bronze leaves, deep pink blossoms and persistent fruit. While Klehm's Bechtel is listed as more susceptible to fire blight, I have not personally found



that to be the case in Billings and it has stunning huge double pale pink blossoms with light sporadic fruit set. Sargent has pink buds with white blossoms, persistent red fruit and excellent disease resistance.

## Planting Considerations

All apple trees, fruiting and ornamental, require at least six hours of sun a day and do best in well-drained fertile soil. Avoid sites that are in a low spot; not only is drainage an issue for the roots, but the pooling of cold air increases the risk for frost damage, especially in spring.

Planting young trees allows them to establish quickly in their permanent home. While planting bare root trees is ideal, availability and timing can be limiting. When planting containerized trees, check for healthy roots that are only minimally circling and then cut any circling roots before planting.

Always dig a wide enough hole to accommodate roots without bending them, but do not dig deeper than the depth required. The wider you dig the hole, the less work new roots must do, while over-digging the depth can result in settling and the tree ending up too deep in the hole. Find the graft (usually 4-6" above the root flare) and the root flare and hold the flare just above the surrounding grade. If the root flare is below the soil line in the container, gently cut away the soil until the root flare is exposed. Be careful not to damage the trunk.

Don't be afraid to cut roots at the time of planting; you are setting up your tree for future success. Gently backfill the planting hole and water in. Refrain from compacting the soil with your feet.

Maintain constant root moisture from the time you purchase your precious tree until it is fully established after several years. Allowing roots to dry out (even once) can cause permanent and sometimes fatal damage. Remember to water after your sprinklers are off in the fall and throughout the winter if the weather is warm and dry.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## The Music of Bees

By Eileen Garvin

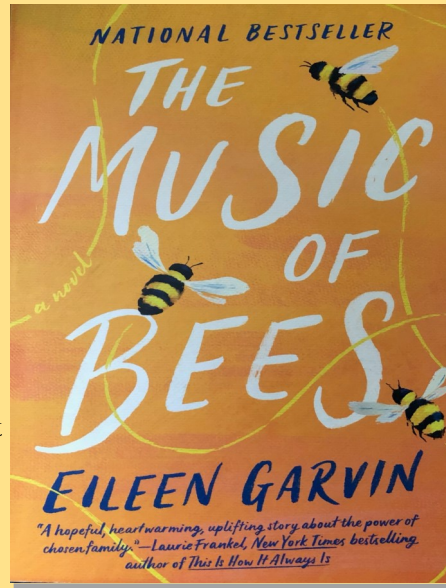
The biologist/scientist part of my constitution reads and reviews garden how-to books and enjoys learning new suggestions for better gardening. It's always great to discover helpful new information and learn about innovative approaches to gardening. There is another part to my gardener self and that is that I love to garden. I love to plant seeds and watch them grow and develop. I love to take care of the garden. I love to eat produce from the garden. And I love to just sit in the middle of the rows and listen and watch what goes on around me on a beautiful summer day, especially the pollinator activities. For example, my spearmint plant is always filled with a dozen different kinds of pollinators and I love watching the bumbling bumblebees busy on the flowers.

**The Music of Bees** beautifully captures the love part of gardening, in this case the love of bees and beekeeping. I have read several books on bees, but none of them has captured the intense, thrumming love of a bee colony described here as experienced by the main characters. Many passages about the bees touched me deeply. The author is a beekeeper and weaves into the story

much information about beekeeping, colony structure and functioning, and the current threats to apiaries from diseases and other causes.

This book is a work of fiction—the lives of the three main characters are somewhat parallel to the lives of the bee colonies. Each character faces seemingly insurmountable life challenges as do the bees in the story. The creation and support of community is a theme for both humans and bees (a lone honeybee cannot survive, especially in winter). One new fact I learned in this book may be partly the reason the book has “music” in its title—that the hives make sounds like music and the queen’s “song” is a G sharp.

The author thanks the Oregon State University Extension Service’s Master Beekeeper Apprentice Program for teaching her so much about honeybees. You can read about the many programs that the OSU Extension Service offers about bees and pollinators by googling OSU Extension Service/bees.



I look forward to reading and reviewing many more gardening books, especially the how-to ones. But for now I am going to go sit in the garden on this beautiful day and, thanks to the insights offered in **The Music of Bees**, indulge in just loving the plants, the soil, the clouds and the bees.



Greenhouse at Metra Park Demonstration Garden

## YCMGA PLANT SALE

By Paul Scarpari, President YCMGA

Saturday, May 18 was a beautiful day for the YCMGA plant sale, a fundraiser for Association educational events. Everyone was thankful for this reward after many volunteers planted 1,026—3.25 inch pots with seeds from the Seed Library. With our fickle Montana weather, it wouldn't have been possible to grow this many vegetables without the new overhead heaters purchased and installed by Joann Glasser.

On March 16, the heaters kept blowing the 50 amp breaker. After solving that issue, construction at the Metra disrupted the water supply to the greenhouse. Meeting with a Metra employee, we were able to arrange for water to be delivered. With the weather changing from cold and cloudy to warm and sunny, it was time to divide and transplant to larger pots. Volunteers were scheduled to check and/or water twice daily as the plants grew.

Sales were strong the first day with good weather and a lot of traffic. Sunday, not so much with a typical cool, cloudy, and rainy Montana day. Since plants were left, the sale was extended to Saturday, May 25. All remaining plants were donated to area Community Gardens. We can't thank our loyal, knowledgeable, and hard-working volunteers enough. It was a fun ride.

Talk about amazing bugs...

## Cicadas

by Ann McKean

Cicadas are in the order Hemiptera, true bugs, which includes sucking insects such as aphids and leaf hoppers. Some cicadas are periodical, emerging en masse every thirteen or seventeen years, while others, including the seventeen species in Montana, are annual with life cycles ranging from 2 to 8 years. The non-periodicals are not synchronized, so some emerge every year.

There are seven species of periodical cicadas found primarily in areas of the eastern and central part of the U.S. Among these seven species there are two 13-year broods and twelve 17-year broods. Two more broods are believed to be extinct. This season two adjacent broods, Broods XIX and XIII, totaling up to one trillion cicadas will emerge simultaneously for the first time since 1803 and will not coemerge again for another 221 years. Periodical cicadas are one inch long with a black back, orange belly and red eyes. (Our annual native Plains cicada is olive, caramel and white and almost twice that long.)

The larvae suck plant fluids from tree roots 12 to 18 inches below ground, emerging to mate when the ground reaches 64 degrees Fahrenheit. Up to 1.5 million cicadas can appear on one acre. By emerging together, they overwhelm predators with their numbers, ensuring enough survive to reproduce. Males generate their mating song with special body parts, called tymbals, on their abdomen (they are the only insects with a true percussion instrument), while females lay eggs by drilling into small branch tips. After six weeks, the larvae hatch, drop to the ground and burrow down nearly two feet for the next 13 or 17 years.

Adult cicadas do not eat and only occasionally drink sap to stay hydrated, so spraying pesticide is useless and dangerous, only harming the animals that may eat the cicadas (and possibly the person doing the spraying). However, because they can be killed by pesticides in the larval stage, cicadas are considered vulnerable insects. They are high in protein and fat and are safe for humans to eat if they have not been sprayed. It is reported they taste like canned asparagus. Yuck.

Cicadas are beneficial because they prune mature trees, aerate the soil, provide food for wildlife and return nitrogen to the soil as they decay. Scientists have found evidence that some animals even time their reproduction to coincide with cicada emergence.

Cicadas do not bite, sting, poke or pinch, but their feet are built to grip tree trunks to haul themselves out of the ground and are disconcertingly scratchy. Cicada killers, the giant solitary wasps which hunt them, do not sting either.

Studies have shown that humans actually feel a stronger sense of community and cooperation during cicada emergences, so this summer, let's come together and appreciate cicadas for their contribution to the natural world, our ecosystems and us!



Periodical Cicada



Plains Cicada

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## Malus (cont.)

If the cost of a new apple tree is not in your budget, Sustainable Montana can help. Their goal is to increase sustainable living for Montana families, and they will provide a fruit tree to qualified applicants at no cost.

Happy planting!

<https://apps.msuextension.org/montguide/guide.html?sku=MT200812AG>

<https://www.montana.edu/news/3638/northern-gardening-tips-keep-the-bloom-but-lose-the-crab-apples>

<https://www.sustainablemontana.org/active-programs.html>

# Botanical Destinations To Visit In Billings

by *Suri Lunde*

Summer is here and it is time to be outdoors! Here are a few local botanical spots for nature-lovers to explore and enjoy.

## ZooMontana

2100 S. Shiloh Rd • 406.652.8100 • [www.zoomontana.org](http://www.zoomontana.org)

Offering more than just animals on display, ZooMontana is also an attraction for visitors interested in botanical gardens. Nine gardens (sensory garden, children's garden, native garden, crevice garden, etc.) and Yellowstone Counties first arboretum are all connected by a trail system within the Zoo compound. All the gardens are overseen by the Botanical Society and are tended by volunteers who are passionate about botany, ecology and conservation.

## DanWalt Gardens

720 Washington St • 406.248.4003 • [www.danwalgardens.com](http://www.danwalgardens.com)

This private botanical garden offers a tranquil yet inspiring experience in its displays of annuals, perennials, shrubs, and trees in a landscaped environment. From May to October, the gardens transform every 2 to 4 weeks as different flowers take turns to blossom throughout the season. Visitors can expect to see resplendent native and exotic blooms set among water features and statuarities, with Serama chickens and Japanese koi fish as fun side appeals.

## Moss Mansion

914 Division St • 406.256.5100 • [www.mossmansion.com](http://www.mossmansion.com)

Although part of the historic Mansion proper, the garden areas outside the building are free to visitors. The grounds are maintained by a group of volunteers who have been improving and beautifying the spaces the past few years. The garden area provides a sanctuary in the middle of downtown Billings. Start there and explore the surrounding historic neighborhood.

## Other Interesting Spots

### Roots Garden Center

2147 Poly Dr • 406.969.1806

Technically a garden center, Roots is novel in that it not only sells plants, fresh flowers, and gardening needs but also has an art gallery showcasing works from local artists, vendors, and jewelers, and a coffee shop.

### Greycliff Mill

11 Greycliff Creek Ln, Greycliff • 406.930.0870

If you are willing to travel an hour outside Billings, Greycliff Mill is a destination to spend an afternoon. The complex has a number of areas to explore: a greenhouse, vegetable gardens, fruit tree orchard, cheese cave, crafts rooms, and a cafe that serves locally made food and where a restored functioning gristmill is situated.



Sensory Garden at ZooMontana (above)  
DanWalt Gardens (below)



Moss Mansion Grounds (below)







# Growing Elderberries

by Ann McKean

Cultivated and harvested for centuries, elderberries are an old fashioned, easy-to-grow fruit. Species are found in North and South America, Europe, Asia and the South Pacific. The two most commonly grown edible species in Montana are the native North American, *Sambucus canadensis* and the European, *Sambucus nigra*. The American elders typically grow six to twelve feet tall, while the *nigra* can reach heights up to twenty feet.

Historically used medicinally by indigenous peoples all over the world, the dark blue elderberry fruits contain powerful antioxidants which boost the immune system. (People with auto-immune disorders should therefore avoid them.)

All green parts of the plants contain toxins and should not be consumed, although green berries can be carefully fermented like capers. The ripe berries must be boiled for 30 to 45 minutes to neutralize cyanide producing compounds, but when fermented or cooked are safe and healthy to eat. The fragrant creamy white compound blossoms are occasionally deep fried but they are most often used as a delicious and delicate flavoring, notably in St. Germaine liqueur.

Fast growing, hollow-stemmed (they have been used to make flutes) and weak-wooded, most elders are tolerant of many growing conditions, especially low, moist areas and part sun, however, they put up with our heavy dry soil just fine.

Some of the ornamental cultivars can be a little fussy about too much moisture and are somewhat susceptible to the fungal disease Botrytis. There are no significant pests. I consider the fruit bearing varieties veritable weeds because of how easy they are to grow. They are attractive and productive, providing bumper crops of berries for the birds and the kitchen.



Although they reputedly benefit from another variety for pollination, I have reliably gathered more berries than I know what to do with from my single 'Adams' shrub for years. Similar to red twig dogwood, they perform and look best when the oldest wood is removed to the ground. New shoots will appear from the roots every year.

To grow these beauties at home, remember to remove all circling roots and plant so that the root flare is at or slightly above grade. Keep soil evenly moist for the depth of the root ball during the first two years of establishment. Once established, plants are drought tolerant, but do appreciate any moisture you give them, and with sufficient moisture,

they will tolerate hot sunny exposures as well as the north side of the house. If you have a spot in your yard, try growing an elderberry this year!

See how to use elderberries on page 11

*How strange that Nature does not knock, and yet does not intrude!*  
— Emily Dickinson

## Elderflowers

Elderflower cordial can be added to everything from chicken salad to cake to champagne. Elderflowers can also be used to make delicate Elderflower sugar. Go ahead and experiment! I'm always conflicted about how many blossoms to cut vs how many berries I want!

### Elderflower Cordial

1 liter water  
800 g (4 c) sugar  
2 lemons, juice and zest  
1 t citric acid  
25 fresh or frozen elderflower heads, stems removed

Snip the flowers from the stalks, removing as much toxic stem as possible. Add the lemon zest, citric acid and lemon juice to the bowl of blossoms. Bring the sugar water to a boil until dissolved and cool till comfortable to touch. Pour over the delicate blossoms, stir and cover with a towel, allowing it to rest. Refrigerate when cool. After two or three days, strain into a sterile jar and refrigerate.



### Elderflower Sugar

500 g (2.5 c) sugar  
1 elderflower umbel

Gently bury the blossoms in the sugar and store in a cool dark place for a week. Carefully remove the blossoms, break up the sugar clumps and shake the sugar through a strainer. Store in a sealed jar.

Note: Harvest the fragrant flowers early in their bloom cycle when fully opened but not browning, cutting the entire umbel as one, and shake off any little critters. Drop them in a basket or paper bag where they are less likely to wilt than in plastic. I don't wash them because they are so delicate and the pollen holds flavor. If you must freeze them, drop them frozen straight into hot sugar syrup to prevent browning during the thaw.

## Elderberries

I prefer to make the berries into a syrup, which I can put on pancakes, take when I have a cold, pour over ice cream or cake or use in cocktails. Use it to make a lovely Kir Royale, which is traditionally made with champagne and crème de cassis. In this case just sub the elderberry syrup for the crème de cassis. Make a virgin Kir Royale with club soda or ginger ale. Elderberries are equally easy to make into jam or jelly. You can also infuse the fruit into vodka, gin or vinegar. Elderberries also make a nice wine. If you make wine, be patient because the tannins need time to mature.

### Elderberry Vinegar

200 g (1 c) elderberries, stems removed  
500 g (2.5 c) organic red wine vinegar

Place elderberries in a pan and lightly crush, then pour the vinegar over them. Simmer for 30 minutes, remove from heat and allow to cool. Pour contents of pan into a sterile jar and leave in a cool dark place for 30 days. Strain and store in a sterile bottle.



### Elderberry Syrup

500 g (2.5 c) elderberries, stems removed  
500 g (2.5 c) water + 350 g (2.75 c) sugar  
1 T lemon juice plus rind

Optional: Cinnamon stick or fresh ginger

Bring berries, water and rind to a boil and simmer *uncovered* for 45 minutes, skimming as necessary. Reduce no more than half. Strain with cheesecloth and return to pan with sugar and lemon juice, stirring until sugar is dissolved and comes to a boil. Remove from heat and skim again. Decant into a sterile bottle and store in refrigerator or seal in jars with hot water bath. To dress it up, you can drop a cinnamon stick and/or fresh sliced ginger into the original simmer.

Note: To harvest the fruit, cut off the entire umbel of dark ripe drupes as one. Wash the drupes well in a cold water bath and set to dry on paper towels. They *will* stain linen towels and your hands. You can either strip the fruit off the branches now (the prongs of a fork work great) or you can freeze them on a sheet pan for later and knock the berries off while they are frozen.

# Herbal Adventures

by Laura Estes

I'm not a food gardener. When I fed others, there wasn't time. Now it just takes too much effort and space away from my "real" garden (trees, shrubs, perennials). But this year I decided mixing in some veg would be a small effort to nourish myself and the planet. And maybe minimize my temptation for convenience foods.

While some perennials are herbs, there are smelly, delicious, beautiful edibles that would never make it through Montana winters and coincidentally grow well in 6-12" of soil—perfect for containers that can be easily tailored to specific conditions.

I started with some traditional food – short carrots (petite Tonda di Parigi) in a barrel, a window box of leaf lettuce in dappled shade, and edible pod peas in a flowerbed with extra vertical space. These were inexpensively bought as seed. To round out my container garden (and indulge a fondness for unusual plants) I looked for unusual herbs at the garden center.

In my hot, dry south-facing garden (and typically being a bit stingy with water), I thought "Mediterranean" and "drought tolerant." In this category I found:

- ◆ Scented geranium (*Pelargonium graveolens* 'Cinnamon Rose') – apparently can add unique flavor baked into pound cake or cookies, also for tea or potpourri
- ◆ Dwarf curry (*Helichrysum italicum* 'Nana') – not a true curry but advertised as adding a similar flavor to meat and vegetables
- ◆ Rosemary – a great addition to poultry dishes or bread and may be used to flavor oil, butter or salt. Benefits from frequent tip pruning.

## Herb / (h)ərb/ noun

Any plant with leaves, seeds, or flowers used for flavoring, food, medicine, or perfume.

(Oxford language dictionary)

Lavender also enjoys a Mediterranean climate but grows as a perennial in my garden. (See *Lavender Demystified* article in the Jan/Feb/Mar issue of this newsletter for information on how to grow your own.)

Then I chose some herbs preferring it damp — salad burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*) and lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) and planted them in self-watering

pots. According to the plant tag, burnet is a great addition to salads, soups, and vinegars. Lemongrass can be used for tea and is a familiar flavor in Asian cuisine.

"Bee-Safe!" and look for herbs labeled "Neonicotinoid-Free" since bees are attracted. These plants are lovely to look at, have culinary uses and I love brushing my hands through them and smelling the fragrances. The next adventure is using them to spice up my life!



## Rosemary Trail Mix

- 1 (15-oz) can chickpeas, rinsed
- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 tsp kosher salt, divided
- 3 (2x1-inch) pieces orange zest, sliced into half inch thick strips
- 1/3 cup pumpkin seeds
- 1/4 cup rosemary leaves
- 1 tbsp pure maple syrup
- 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1/2 cup unsweetened coconut



Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 F.

Pat chickpeas dry and toss on baking sheet with 1 tbsp oil; season with 1/2 tsp salt. Roast chickpeas, stirring halfway through until crisp and golden brown (about 35-40 minutes).

Meanwhile, toss orange zest, pumpkin seeds, rosemary, maple syrup, cayenne, remaining 2 tbsp oil, and remaining 1/2 tsp salt in a small bowl.

Remove chickpeas from oven and add pumpkin seed mix; toss to coat. Continue roasting until orange zest is shriveled and pumpkin seeds are pale green, about 5 minutes.

Remove from heat and add in coconut flakes; let cool.

# Believe It or Not

by Amy Grandpre



## Story 1

After working at the Extension Office for numerous years, you settle in to the cycle of things. Every year whether spring, summer, winter or fall, the horticulture questions follow the usual pattern. Planting and garden prep questions in spring;

plant culture, disease and pest control in summer; harvest, produce storage, and putting the garden to bed in fall; and in winter rodent control and houseplant care.

When a plague erupts (like the pine bark beetle invasion), it's the same question many times a day for sometimes weeks on end. So when a question comes in that's way out of the norm, it REALLY stands out.

I've had the springtime "baby bird fell out of the tree, how do I help it survive" questions, but one particular client really pushed the extremes. He was trying to capture and safely release a ladybug from the inside of his home to the outside. During the process he damaged one of the wings and he was absolutely broken over it, as the ladybug could no longer fly. He had retrieved the precious ladybug and wanted so much to make it right.

At first I thought it had to be a prank on your local horticulturist. But thankfully I played along, as this gentleman turned out to be sober serious.

**Lesson learned:** Don't jump to conclusions. Take time to intentionally listen, as we are all wired so very differently.

## Story 2

Back when Master Gardener classes in Yellowstone County, were DVDs done by specialists in Bozeman and embellished with the help of local Master Gardeners, our MGs expanded educational opportunities with hands on learning and Q&A sessions.

One particular year...way back when marijuana was not as free as today...we were doing classes in the smallish Courthouse meeting room. This was during the time when medical marijuana was permitted in public, though not federally sanctioned.

A few students were joint-toting conspicuously behind their ear. And after mid-break they frequently returned with most interesting fumes following, which soon permeated the smallish classroom. I had no problem with the medical marijuana, but the projection of that right seemed a bit forward for a class setting. Obviously, the other students were very aware, but we carried on with classes as usual.

About halfway through the multi-class sessions, things got very interesting. It seems our classes were not covering the subject matter that these particular students had signed up for, which was the growing and culture of marijuana. And they were not satisfied with my response of it not being part of our curriculum.

After they pressed, I eventually contacted my bosses in Bozeman, to come up with the absolute stance for this now most touchy situation. The answer was: "Since marijuana is not federally sanctioned, there would be no class time devoted to its culture. The culture of plants is thoroughly covered through the Master Gardener program and would apply."

So for those long-time Master Gardeners who were present during these sessions, you witnessed part of the history of marijuana prohibition.

**Lesson learned:** You never know how things can change given a few years.

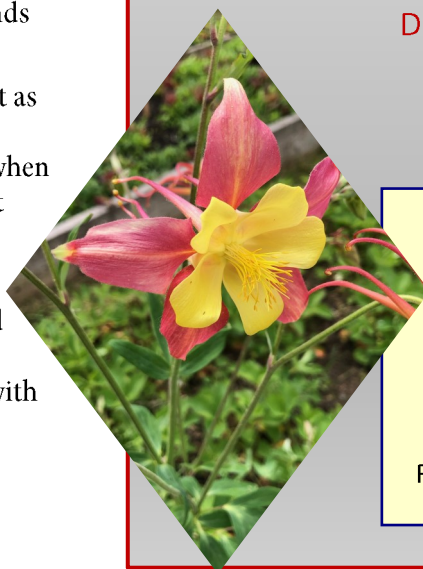
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We want your articles, garden pictures or quotes, and suggestions.

Email [ymastergardener@gmail.com](mailto:ymastergardener@gmail.com)

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