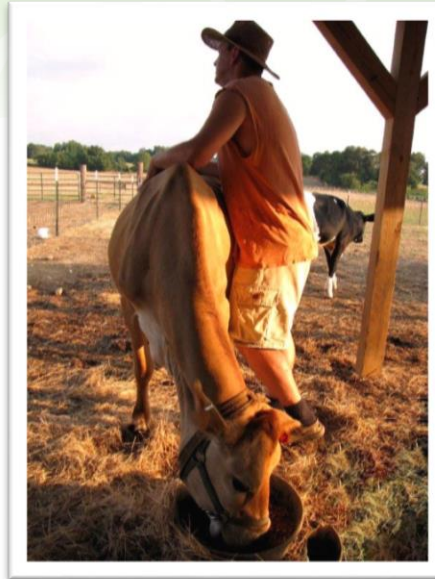


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the
Magnolia Chronicle

Newsletter for the Pulaski County Master Gardeners



UofA
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System



Getting to know Randy

By Phyllis Barrier and Betty Deere

As of June 1st, Randy Forst took over as the Pulaski County Extension Agent. To help to get to know him, here's a little background on our new leader. He grew up near Paris, Arkansas, on a cattle and row-crop farm. He was the middle child – sixth of 11 children. His family raised Angus cattle, hay, soybeans, milo, and wheat. The family had a huge vegetable garden, and his mother had lots of flowers. His grandparents on both sides of his family were avid gardeners. He has a BS in Landscape Design & Urban Horticulture and a MS in General Agriculture. Prior to moving here, Randy was the county agent in Carroll County for three years, and before that he was a county agent in Saint Francis County for three years. Before his Extension career, he worked for a landscape architecture firm in Tennessee for seven years. In the past, he helped the Master Gardeners with their sanction projects, educational programs, horticultural lectures for the public, plant sales, and youth gardening programs. He looks forward to working with the Pulaski County Master Gardeners and hopes to get to know all 483 of us.

His new farm is located in Little Rock, AR in a community called Landmark. It needs a lot of work. It has been abandoned for about five years. He is relying on the Dorper sheep and Jersey milk cows to help whip it back into shape. He also raises free range laying hens, white fantail pigeons, peacocks, and all kinds of vegetables. As for his hobbies, he likes to cook and all types of gardening, which he describes as a stress reliever. He's particularly fond of "share with a friend" perennials.

May Checklist

The blooming trees, shrubs, and plants are renewing our spirits. The white of the Bradford Pear with the pink of the flowering fruit trees, the yellow of the Daffodils (think Wye Mountain) and Forsythia, the red and pink of the Camellias, the beautiful colors of the Tulips (think Garvan Gardens) . . . these all make us want to head to the yard and work in our flower beds.

A TIME TO SOW

Sow these seeds now: early Asters, Basil, Canterbury Bells, Celosia, Columbine, Cosmos, Foxgloves, Gumphrena, Grasses, Hollyhock, Melampodium, Morning Glories, Petunias, Sunflowers, Sweet Peas and Sweet William.

VEGETABLES

April is the best month in the vegetable garden because it allows you to plant both spectrums of vegetables - the cool season ones until mid month, and the warm season ones starting mid-month. By mid month we can start planting Squash, Tomatoes, Green Beans, Corn, Peppers, Eggplants and Cucumbers. You don't have to have a stand alone vegetable garden. Intersperse vegetables and herbs with your ornamentals, which is another way to get double duty. If you are a beginning vegetable gardener, start small and build on success. A large garden may seem like a good idea in April, but be a challenge by late June or July. (You might want to try square foot gardening, see THE NEW SQUARE FOOT GARDENING BOOK by Mel Bartholomew.) When starting a vegetable garden, choose a site that gets plenty of sunlight and is well drained, but near a water source. Gardens in Arkansas won't survive without supplemental water, and if it is difficult to do, most gardeners don't have the time or the energy to make it work. When choosing tomato plants, choose healthy plants, but remove any blooms or small fruits. If your tomato plants begin setting fruit at a young age, all the energy will go into fruiting and less into producing a healthy, vigorous plant. While you may claim the title of first tomato in the neighborhood, overall your production will be lower.

HOUSEPLANTS

I know we are all tempted to take our houseplants outside right now. Janet Carson has always recommended waiting until the middle of the month. When you take them outside, slowly acclimate them to the sun. Otherwise, they can sunburn. As you move the tropical flowers like Hibiscus, Mandevilla and Bougainvillea outside, repot them and prune them back by at least one third, if not more. These summer tropical flowers bloom on new growth and you need to encourage that by alleviating root bound conditions and encouraging new growth. If you don't repot or prune, you will see limited new growth. Limited new growth means less flowers as well. Start fertilizing every three to four weeks and your plants should be blooming again in no time.

ANNUALS

Winter annuals had a pretty good growing season. They still look great now and should continue until really warm weather. Continue to enjoy them, and begin to interplant with summer color. Summer annuals are arriving daily at local garden centers and there are so many choices that it is hard to pick. Summer snapdragon (Angelonia spp.) is a great performer and the Sunpatiens did outstanding in full sun last year. Coleus is available for sun or shade and another great shade plant is the Grape-O-Licious Torenia. It never stopped last season. There are many choices of Begonia for sun and shade, and the Zahara Zinnias are a winner for the sun. Try some of your favorites, but try some new plants, too.

BULBS

Spring bulbs begin blooming in February and continue through early April, depending on the bulb. All bulbs need at least six weeks of green growth after blooming to set flowers for next year. Once they had six weeks of green growth, you can cut the foliage off and they should be set for next year. You can begin to plant summer bulbs this month. Don't be too quick to plant Caladium. They like warm soil. Elephant Ears (Alocasia and Colocasia), Canna and Gladiolus can be planted now. If your Cannas are too crowded, divide them as soon as you can so you won't interfere with blooming this summer.

SHRUBS

Most of our landscape plants should be growing. Think about the seasons and take a look at your landscape. If your winter landscape was barren, look at Camellias. Winter Honeysuckle does great along with Mahonias and Winter Jasmine to spice up the winter color. Spring blooms are usually covered pretty well in most gardens, but to carry that color into summer, look at Wiegela, Mock Orange, early Summer Spireas, Itea and then Clethra for later blooms. Gardenias are always welcome with their fragrant flowers, and Viburnums can add color and fragrance. Summer plants include Hydrangeas, Althea, Buddleia, and Roses. Plants for fall interest include the Itea with bright red foliage, and Burning Bush also gives us great Fall color. Loropetalums now come in dwarf to standard size, so pick the right plant for your location. If purple foliage and pink flowers are not to your liking, try the green leafed, white flowered forms.

LAWNS

Lawns are greening up now and even if weeds are present, this is not a good time to spray weed killers. Wait for the grass to totally green up before applying the first application of a slow release nitrogen fertilizer. You can mow winter weeds that are blooming now to prevent more blooms and seed set, but don't use herbicides that may damage the lawn.

Message from President Marylea Gazette

We are very excited to have the Newsletter up and running again and very much appreciate Jeffrey and her committee for their commitment to this project. She has asked for a brief message from the Board regarding current or upcoming events.

We recently voted to take on a new project at Heifer International. This is an educational vegetable garden currently being planted by the Master Gardener project committee and will be available to view as a stop for the Ice Cream Social in July so check it out.

Of course, we also have the Saturday new Master Gardener class in Conway starting June 13, 2015 and several Pulaski County folks have signed up to take this class. Our regular Fall class will begin Aug 26, 2015 in the usual spot at the State Extension Office and applications are currently being taken for this class. So tell your friends!

The Board welcomed a new member, Sharon Lovell, at the April meeting who will fill the position of Treasurer. As some of you are aware, our current Treasurer, Darla Adams, is moving out of State in June and we are fortunate and excited to have Sharon joining us. She has a strong financial background and has worked in various aspects of the accounting world which is certainly an asset for us. This will be a little confusing for a while as both the Treasurer and Asst Treasurer Positions are now filled with someone named "Sharon". They will be referred to as Sharon L. and Sharon G just for future reference.

Feel free to contact any of your Board Members if you have a question or concern. We are committed to all of you and this program. Our goal is to make it a learning experience and fun at the same time. Thanks to all for your support. Marylea Gazette, Board President

Please join us at the May meeting

St James United Methodist Church
May 19, 2015 at 11:30 am

Dr. Tamara Walkingstick
presents

**Threats to Our Trees
Emerald Ash Borer**



Spring workday in Scholars Garden



AMAZING PEONIES

By Betty Deere

I was sitting on my back deck this morning, admiring my huge, green-leafed, blossomless peony; serenely presiding over an almost empty flowerbed by the tool shed. Creating a lovely picture all by itself. This peony gave its all in profusion of pink fragrant puffs – way back a couple of months ago. I actually started writing this peony article back then, but got sidetracked. But I'm struck by how lovely it is right now, with no blossoms, gracing a barren flowerbed with green artful symmetry.

I'm always adored peonies – their sweet smell as much as their fluffy beauty! I've got (or HAD—I'll tell more about that later!) two pink peonies in my backyard that had fallen upon hard times, after the long cruel winter. They already had struggled to reach their potential, falling jst short of their original glory--after I moved them seven years ago from Heber Springs. One of them had refused to grow much, and barely bloom; depressed, I think it was, refusing to adjust to Little Rock.

In fact I thought Little One had been lost forever this early spring, but lo! To my amazement, it came struggling up through the bare earth, making a mighty effort to rise again. Big One was coming on like gang busters! Apparently they liked all the snow and ice we had. I was shocked too because I'd been negligent and not covered them with a good mulch blanket before winter hit.

Not to mention my yard crew had seriously "trimmed" the weaker one last fall. Obviously they were doubtful whether it was a real plant, or an illegal alien that had somehow gotten into the flowerbed. So they just roughed it up good. Not destroyed, just gave it a good whack job. (You all know what I felt like doing to my yard crew – yes, whacking them!) So I fired them! (They had committed other "crimes" too.)

So this past early spring I geared up to nurture the heck out of the poor thing (both of them actually); and see if my magic concoction of compost, fish juice and Superthrive could bring them back to life, concentrating especially on Little One.

Even though I poured my heart as well as my magic potions into this project, I worried that Little One would ever make a comeback! I also considered moving them, because I knew one of their problems had been needing more sunshine. But they are long haul plants and don't like to be disturbed. So I let them be, and just doctored them lovingly with my organic meds, and watched their small efforts at growth. . . . and waited.

They came back! Both of them – Little and Big both! Big outdid any previous performance, beautiful green leaves and profuse pink perfumed blossoms; and Little One was no slouch either. It proudly birthed itself a few small blossoms, it stood tall and its leaves were a healthy, vibrant shade of green. I was so proud of them.

I believe another reason for their amazing resurrection was because my neighbor cut down his huge old oak tree (it was seriously ailing!), so the sun cast more warmth on their bed. My happy Big One now spreads itself four and a half feet wide and about two and a half feet tall. It is unbelievably huge!

Now for the bad news. Little One did not fare so well. It got whacked to the bare ground last week by my new yard crew. It's gone, I think. Don't ask me why they picked on him; he was small (about 1x1) but healthy. They also whacked several of my emerging black elephant ears. All gone. I can't keep firing lawn crews, so I'll grieve in silence. There is some good news though.

Since Big is so big now, it would benefit from dividing this fall, unloading some of its weight. I can create at least three young ones I think, from this one massive beauty. They are easily divided, but not as often like, irises; they are happy dividing every 5-10 years. You dig a rather shallow hole, big enough to spread the roots out without crowding them, not too deep; then gentle cover and water.

Mulch good; don't let them go through another winter like last year with ice and snow and freezing temps without a good warm blanket. They will reward you. They will even forgive you if, like me, you neglect to properly bed them down for winter. That is, IF you make loving amends!

Part of the reward is their unbelievable fragrance. Did I mention their blossoms smell so sweet that ants flock to them? The peonies don't seem to mind this constant parade of ants, I don't know what to do about it, and what I read says no harm is done. Except when I cut a bouquet for my dining table, and discover I've also brought in a whole clan of ants, providing an interesting addition to my table decoration.

What can I say, except peonies are just darn pleasing to the eye, blossoms or not. Although my peonies are spring bloomers, there are other varieties that are early, mid and late season bloomers. I'm thinking of getting a couple more that bloom mid-summer or late. But even without blossoms, they are "lookers" all season. The foliage has a lovely Asian effect, with pronged leaves like small green hands.

Just goes to show that all of us don't have to be "bloomers" to be valuable and beautiful additions to our world.



From the Travel Committee

North Little Rock Garden Tour

Tuesday June 2, 2015 at 9 am

Meet at the NLR Target parking lot at 9 am on the side facing the interstate and close to the pizza restaurant. After the garden tours join the group for lunch at the Irish Pub in Argenta.

For information call Arline Jackson at 501-219-2080



2015 Mount Holly Garden Series

Sponsored by Margaret Wyatt and the Downtown Dames.

Meets the 3rd Saturday morning April through October at 9:00 AM

Mount Holly Cemetery

(In our 7th Year)

April 18, 2015

Mike Engle, Making Tuffa Planters & Filling them for your Spring Garden

May 16, 2015

Eric Hunt, Garden Photography

June 20, 2015

Brent Baker, Native Plants for Gardening

July 18, 2015

Mark Gibson, Green Thumb

August 15, 2015

Susan Rose, How to Make Bottle Trees

September 19, 2015

John Baker, President Arkansas Rose Society

Oct 17, 2015

Ted Lewis, Floral Express, Halloween, Thanksgiving & Christmas Decorations

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REMINDER

**MASTER GARDENER SPRING PICNIC
PINNACLE MG PROJECT PAVILION**

MAY 19TH, 2015

6:00 - 8:30

\$12.00 PER PERSON

RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE BY MAY 14TH

Name _____

Guest _____

I want the vegetarian option