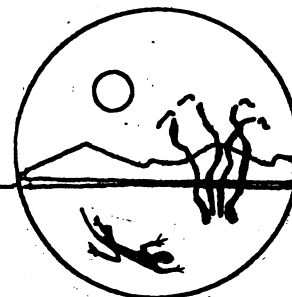


High on the Desert

Cochise County Master Gardener

Newsletter



University of Arizona and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

Watermelon

Watermelons are a lot of fun to grow, but they take a long time and need lots of sun and dry feet. An ideal spot to grow melons would be a piece of ground that slants towards the south or west.

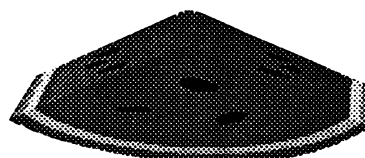
Sprout seeds in towels and plant the melons under hotcaps. When a baby watermelon has gotten as big as your fist you can use the tin can trick. The tin can trick is nothing more than placing the melon on a can above the soil. This will help them to ripen earlier and some say they will be a lot juicier. Pick off any blossoms or fruit on the plant that is not going to have the time to mature.

Watermelons are planted in raised hills no closer than six to eight feet apart. Don't cheat on the fertilizer. Before you plant the seeds add lots of compost and manure to the soil under the area where you are planting. Side dress the plant before the runners leave the center of the plant. Keep checking for shriveled or dried up fruit and remove. Don't panic - it happens often.

When the melon patch is wet, stay out of it.

Check the underside of the watermelon to see if it is ripe. If it is still white and sets on the

ground, it isn't ripe. If the underside is yellow it should be ready for eating. (See related article on Page 4)



Toward the end of August, select the melons you think will be great and take the others off. This will produce larger melons and a lot better eating.

Barry R. Bishop
Master Gardener/Staff Writer

High on the Desert

Work on our third annual High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference to be held March 1-3, 1996 has begun. The next planning meeting will be held:

Wednesday, July 19 at 4:30 pm
at the Sierra Vista U of A campus, Room 103. All interested Master Gardeners and Trainees are urged to attend. There are many opportunities to serve on the committees. Join us for a rewarding way to volunteer in our Cochise County Master Gardener program!

Cochise County Cooperative Extension

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(520) 458-1104, Ext. 141

450 Haskell, Willcox, AZ 85643
(520) 384-3594

Cuttings "N" Clippings

➤ Cutworms getting your small plants? The worm eats the small plants as they enjoy the warmth of sunny days just as they seem to break through the soil. One way to stop them is to take toilet tissue rolls (the cardboard inner cylinder), cut into three parts and put each tube around a plant like a collar. Push it into the soil an inch or so to protect the plant even more and to prevent the wind from taking it away. If you see a worm, step on it.

➤ Several years ago Bob Ward owned Bob's Nursery just outside of Sierra Vista. He had a green thumb (actually she has ten green thumbs), Pearl O'Neill, working for him. He also was in the landscaping business and wasn't able to start his own garden until he made sure everyone he worked for had a good start on theirs. According to Pearly Mae, Bob never started his garden until the monsoon season provided him with free water - sometime in early July. He started his transplants in the greenhouse, hardened them off, and put them in the soil. When you are told that you should have planted your garden in the spring or the old wives' tale that it is far too late, let old Bob teach us that it is just the opposite. If there is one thing we soon learn in gardening it is that whatever works best for us, re-

gardless of what the experts say, we will do, right Bob?

➤ The Southwestern Low Desert Gardening and Landscaping Conference, *Growing Through Knowledge*, will be held at the Arizona Biltmore Resort and Conference Center in Phoenix, August 11 - 13. Keynote speakers include Jim Wilson, co-host of *The Victory Garden* and author of many books, Alex Shigo, Ph.D., renowned plant pathologist and tree expert, and our own Rob Call, clarifying many of the myths that have been associated with gardening. Registration forms are available at the Cooperative Extension offices (early registration ends July 21). Plan to attend - sessions include many of interest to us here in the high desert.

Sing Along!

Sing this little ditty to the song made famous by Chubby Checker called *Twist*:



"Let's mulch again like we did last summer. Let's mulch again as only we know how. Mulching time is here."

Newsletter Staff:

Barry R. Bishop
Carolyn Gruenhagen
Elizabeth Riordon
Virginia Westphal

Robert E. Call
Robert E. Call, Extension
Agent-Horticulture

Yeah, we know, we know. We mulched when we were getting our gardens ready to plant. We used straw, grass cuttings without weed seeds, cotton gin garbage without pesticides and herbicides, ground-up tree cuttings, newspaper, cardboard, and even some old garbage devoid of meat scraps.

Yeah we made it between eight and ten inches high. Yes, we wetted it and it did get smaller and the wind blew some of it away, but we still have some.

But the weeds are saying to themselves that the mulch wasn't much and didn't prevent me from growing. In fact, we are getting bad backs trying to cultivate and keep the weeds out. But our water bills are higher than we want. Sad to say, but much of the water we are trying to use on our plants go to the weeds instead.

Well thank you for answering your own questions. To beat the weeds, mulch more, and when they peek out at the world with their leaves, add even more mulch to get rid of them. By adding more mulch you won't have to water as much because less of the precious stuff will be evaporated into the air because it is protected by the mulch you laid down.

No, I'm not into saving backs or hard work either, but you can work smarter and save in the pocketbook.

Barry R. Bishop
Master Gardener/Staff Writer

July Reminders

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

Deadline Approaches for "Field Trips" Guide

Public gardens in Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas and Colorado are urged to participate in the September 1995 "Field Trips" special section of *Phoenix Home & Garden* magazine. To be included in the "Field Trips" section, please submit a general information release and brief calendar of events occurring between September 1995 and August 1996.

A limited number of illustrations will accompany the guide. Send information by July 15, 1995 to:

"FIELD TRIPS"

Phoenix Home & Garden
4041 N. Central Ave. Ste.A-100
Phoenix, AZ 85012

For more information, contact Candice Miles, Senior Editor, at (602) 234-0804.

Fresh Produce!

Southeastern Arizona boasts the state's largest assortment of direct-sales farms. Whether you buy them from a roadside stand or pick them yourself, the diversity of fruits, nuts, and vegetables rivals any supermarket. A brochure listing producers from which you may purchase produce is available from the Willcox Chamber of Commerce. Send a self-addressed stamped envelope to them at 1500 North Circle I Road, Willcox, AZ 85643 (tell. 520-384-2272) or stop by the Cooperative Extension offices in either Willcox or Sierra Vista for a copy.

Southwestern Low Desert Gardening and Landscaping Conference "Growing Through Knowledge"

The Master Gardeners from the University of Arizona Maricopa County Cooperative Extension will be holding their annual conference on August 11, 12, and 13 at the Arizona Biltmore Resort and Conference Center in Phoenix. Keynote speakers include Jim Wilson, co-host of *The Victory Garden* on PBS and author of many books, Alex Shigo, Ph.D., renowned plant pathologist and tree expert, and our own Rob Call, who will clarify many of the myths that have been associated with gardening. There are many sessions that we in the high desert will benefit from. Registration forms are available at the Cooperative Extension offices in Willcox and Sierra Vista. Early registration ends July 21. For information write: Arizona Master Gardeners, Inc. c/o Cheryl Czaplicki, P.O. Box 87585, Phoenix, AZ 85080.

THE AGENT'S OBSERVATIONS

QUESTION: When should I plant native warm season grasses and how should I prepare the soil?

ANSWER: Warm season native grasses include but are not limited to the bluestems, buffaloes, grammas, Indian rices, love-grasses, sideoats and wheatgrasses. Planting of most of these grasses should occur just before the monsoon rainy season begin in July. Seeding rates vary between different grass species. For example Buffalo grass is seeded at 3 to 4 pounds and blue grama grass is seed at 1 to 2 pounds per 1,000 square feet. In most situations it is advisable to mix 2 or more compatible species together and sow them so there is more diversity in the planting.

For best germination and stand till the soil 4 to 6 inches deep, (this is very necessary on new construction sites because of compacted soil), rake smooth, spread seed, and top dress with compost or composed manure. The dark compost will warm the soil and hold moisture which aids in germination.

Many of these warm season grasses make attractive

landscape areas but are not suited to heavy traffic and play. However, breeding programs are currently developing turf type lawn grasses from native warm season grass species that will withstand traffic. Also, many of these grasses are more drought tolerant than the more traditional turf grass and require less water than bermuda grass.

QUESTION: What is the best way to determine if melons are ripe? I try thumping but I don't seem to always get a good melon.

ANSWER: My favorite way to determine if a watermelon is ripe is to look at the fruit and follow the vine back to a set of tendrils, which are on the vine near the stem end of the fruit. When these dry up and wither the watermelon is ripe. If you don't have a vine to look at observe the ground spot, which is the place the melon rested on the ground. When the ground spot has turned creamy white or yellow the melon is ready. Seedless watermelons are the most difficult to determine if they are ripe. A friend of mine swears that by placing the watermelon on the stem end and putting your ear to the blossom end and squeezing with both hands you can hear the juice of the watermelon. The more juicy

sounding the riper the watermelon. As for thumping I guess those who are trained in this art need to teach the rest of us what to listen for!

Cantaloupes or muskmelons are ripe when the stem is slipping from the fruit. That means that the fruit is separating from the plant it is fully ripe. At times amber or reddish "sap" will ooze from the stem onto the fruit.

A sure fire method is to cut into the melon and eat some, noting the tendrils, ground spot color, and juice running off your elbows!

Over watering or excessive rainfall during the last few weeks of melon growth can dilute the sugars and flavor of a melon. Reduce irrigation for the last several weeks of growth to insure sweet, flavorful melons. Also remember that there are great differences in melon varieties, so write down the varieties you grow and their qualities both good and bad so you can remember from year to year which melons you enjoy the most.

Robert E. Call
Extension Agent, Horticulture



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BUDDY BUGS: Bees

(Reprinted from July 1992)

Honey has been a source of food for man since primitive times. A Spanish rock painting, dated from about BC 7,000 shows a figure gathering honey. Beekeepers first kept their colo-

cantaloupe, and watermelon need such transfer. Even plants that are capable of self-pollination will produce more, larger, and better shaped fruit if they are cross-pollinated. Good examples of such self-fruitful, bee pollinated crops are strawberries, peaches, and nectarines.

Years ago solitary bees (wild bees that do not colonize)

to compound the poisoning from our own back yards. We must follow pesticide and herbicide instructions, use them on days that are not windy, and prevent run-off of chemicals, particularly now that Sierra Vista will be using wastewater/wildlife ponds.

You can try to increase the number of bees in your garden



nies in hollow logs, baskets, or clay jars. The bees were killed in the fall so that the honey could be gathered.

Now, beekeeping is a scientifically managed agricultural business. Bees, originally found only in the Old World, are now everywhere except the polar regions. The bounty of your vegetable plot or fruit trees can be attributed to the work of the bees as well as to your gardening skills.

Many fruits and vegetables require pollen from another plant in order to produce. Bees transfer the necessary pollen from one plant to another. Most apples, pears, cherries, plums, almonds, citrus,

nested in the vegetation along fences, open ditches, and weed-lined roads. It was these bees that pollinated wildflowers, family gardens, and small farms and orchards. Chemical weed control, underground storm drains, and the widespread use of pesticides (solitary bees are more susceptible to pesticides than are honey bees) have greatly reduced the solitary bee population. Honey bees are becoming more important, therefore, and yet, beekeepers are losing an increasing number of hives to chemical poisoning. Many of the pesticides and chemicals are dispersed by farmers and public works departments. We need to be sure not

by putting in flowering plants. Or, you can assure yourself of plenty of bees by putting a hive in your own garden. Do-it-yourself hobby beekeeping kits are available commercially. You can have your own fresh honey as well as a wonderfully producing garden.

*Elizabeth Riordon
Master Gardener*

(Editor's Note: The great great grandfather of Elizabeth Riordon is "the father of modern beekeeping," Lorenzo Lorrain Langstroth. Lorenzo used the crucial 3/8" "bee space" to design the first movable-frame modern bee hive.)

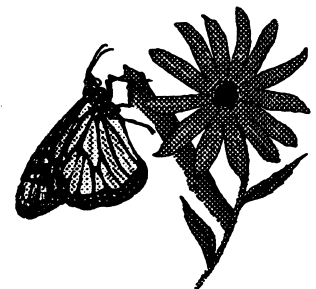
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MG Trainee*



Shades of memories
Colored pink and blue
Like Arizona Blue Eyes
And pink bull thistles too.

When a few wildflowers
Appear in your yard
To happily greet the morning sun,
Select a chosen few, to be the chosen ones.

And just leave them alone
They have a reason to live,
Their seeds scattered by the birds
And God's windy warm breath.

Native wildflowers are the best,
Like the sunflower family (ASTERACEAE),
Five-needle Fetid Marigold,
And Threadleaf Groundsel (*Senecio douglasii*).

California Poppy, Scarlet Gilia, Mountain Aster,
Indian Paintbrush, Skyrocket, Purple Aster.
For every wildflower there is a season,
Can you comprehend the Creator's reason?

You may invite some wildflowers
Into your own backyard,
And to add to your delight . . .
Touch the star shaped flowers
That reach towards the galaxy at night.