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The Arizona Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., (AFGC) and the University of Arizona Master Gardeners are very happy to offer the first of four National Garden Clubs landscape design courses on November 12 - 13, 2016.

The courses are being offered to all AFGC members, Master Gardeners, and the public at large and will be held at the University of Arizona extension office at 4341 E. Broadway Road in Phoenix. Courses II, III, and IV will be offered in approximately six months increments over the next two years.

The AFGC is a 501c3 charitable organization made up of 20 local garden clubs, two plant societies whose mission is to provide education and promote the love of gardening, floral design, and civic as well as environmental responsibility to its members and the general public.

The AFGC is also a member of National Garden Clubs, Inc. which is comprised of fifty state garden clubs, the National Capital Area Garden Club, and 447 international affiliates.

This is the first time in more than twenty years that these courses have been held in Arizona and the AFGC is very excited offer them. A registration form for the first course is available on the AFGC website.

For further information and/or a copy of the registration form, please contact Linda Rominger at LSROM@cox.net.

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**Attention Writers!**

Please submit your articles for the May issue to: Kelly Obiadi at editorobiadi@gmail.com by April 15.
The last of the ‘why we live here’ weather is in sight but you wouldn’t know it in the vegetable garden!

The leafy green season came to an end with the unseasonably, or is it unreasonably, warm weather but squash are beginning to bloom, cukes are picking up steam, beans are becoming bushy, and melons are beginning their ramble around the garden. The peppers and tomatoes are beginning to set fruit and spring is well underway. Could there still be space in the garden for those hot season crops planted in late April that make the gardener look good all summer while producing something to harvest and eat? If so, you might want to consider some of the following...

Members of the cucurbit family produce both male and female flowers on each plant. Initially they produce lots of male flowers. But despair not! If you stuff, sauté or consume squash blossoms, these are easy pickings early in the season! As the plant matures, it begins to invest in developing female flowers which can be identified by the small fruit at the base of the flower. Once female flowers appear, cut back on harvesting blossoms so pollination can occur. As long as temperatures remain under 95 degrees or so, pollen is active and viable and we will be able to harvest a crop! All pumpkins, squash, melons, cucumbers, and gourds demonstrate this particular characteristic.

Plant cosmos, zinnia, or love-in-a-mist. If you have enough room, try tithonia, also known as Mexican Sunflower. Sunflowers are great in almost any size or color. Allow parsley and a carrot or two to bloom for the pollinators and beneficial insects. Look for verbena bonariensis or cleome seed to add to your garden. Old fashioned, seed-planted flowers are more generous with pollen and nectar than many of the hybrid bedding flowers sold in packs.

Take your garden to the tropics! Moringa oleifera benefits from the warmer soils to become established. All parts of this wonder plant are purported to be edible and remarkably nutritious. A moringa tree was recently planted in the orchard at the extension office. Malabar spinach types are tasty as well as ornamental, scrambling up a trellis in a container with some annuals. Another tropical edible is longevity spinach (Gynura procumbens.) Also a vining plant that really makes an impression in the garden this time of year, it is not be confused with perennial spinach which is a non-bolting chard. Oh, the joy of common names!

Grow melokhiya (Corchorus olitorius,) This plant kept the slaves alive while they were building the pyramids along the Nile. Cooked or raw, it is full of nutrients and worth adding to summer salads, smoothies, or on a sandwich. By now New Zealand spinach (Tetragonia tetragonioides) should be harvestable. Sometimes it lasts until the monsoon, sometimes not, so eat it while it is plentiful! This plant will happily reseed itself if you allow it to go to seed. The germination rate is abominable, but with each subsequent year more seedlings appear in the areas where you planted it in years past. In the extension office demonstration garden we grew jicama last year for the first time in ages. They get to be an enormous vine with grand blue flower spikes by November. There’s not a lot of harvest for the investment of space, but worth playing with if you have a wall or structure to cover.

Other summer favorites are basils all flavors and colors, grown as an herb and as a source of nectar for beneficial insects. Plant hibiscus (H. sabdariffa) or H. acetosella, a smaller, less tangy yet edible variety, with a leaf flavor akin to French sorrel. Sweet potatoes are a great groundcover, produce pounds of tubers, and the greens are as full of nutrients as the tubers. Don’t forget about okra and the many varieties of black eyed peas! Look to Native Seed Search for local varieties that have been selected and refined from those first imported from the Old World. Peanuts are pretty, fun, and forgiving plants when grown in containers all summer, even if they are less productive in a container. Be sure to use raw peanuts or order some to plant. Cooked peanuts simply will not grow.

The soils are warming up so it’s time to mulch tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants. Mulching spring and summer crops with a couple inches of compost reduces evaporation, moderates soil temperatures, and reduces weeds. Place shade cloth over tomatoes and peppers by the end of this month. Peppers do not need heavy shade but 20-30% cover makes a long summer less stressful. Adjust irrigation timers as necessary to insure maturing plants do not suffer from water deficiencies leading to poor production, pests, and general disappointment.

Be adventurous in your summer garden. Don’t just stand there; plant something!
APRIL UPDATE

The April Update will be April 13. The speaker for the April MG Update will be Dr. Judith Brown of the University of Arizona, an expert in the field of plant viruses carried by insect vectors. She has done extensive research with plant pathology involving white flies and the citrus psyllid which pose a significant threat to Arizona.

As always, volunteers to help with set up and providing refreshments are always welcome; volunteer credit is available for these activities.

Come join us!

Olivette Aviso, Master Gardener
Co-Chair of the MG Update

We Need Gardens for the 2017 Real Gardens for Real People Tour

It is going to be hard to beat the wonderful gardens and beautiful weather we experienced for the 2016 Real Gardens for Real People Tour, but we are going to try! We are now looking for gardens in Chandler to feature on the spring, 2017 tour. Three or four Master Gardeners are also needed to be part of the garden selection committee.

The committee will visit the potential gardens, hopefully in April, giving owners almost a year to get them fine-tuned. If you would like your garden to considered, please contact Sue Lanker at slanker@email.arizona.edu.

Login to MG Central to view the calendar of events.

Please submit any calendar events to Karen Sankman at injmom1@yahoo.com.
The goal of the Volunteer of the Month program is to recognize the exemplary volunteers who carry the master gardening message to the community in which they live. These men and women are the heart and soul of the Master Gardener Program. Pam Perry is the Volunteer of the Month for April.

It’s only fitting that I should sit outside to write about Pam Perry since she seems most at home working in her garden. It would be safe to say that any master gardener who has taken the Maricopa County Master Gardener course over the past 16 years either knows Pam or knows of her, especially if they have ventured out into the extension office demonstration garden. In fact, during my master gardener training, staff and instructors advised me to work with Pam in the garden if I wanted to learn about desert gardening.

Pam graduated from the Maricopa County Master Gardener course in 2000. She didn’t begin volunteering in the demonstration garden from the start because she was still working at the time. Instead she devoted her time to the Speakers Bureau. However Pam wasn’t new to master gardening. She had already taken the course and been certified in Adams County, Colorado, and later in Solano, California. In all, Pam’s master gardening experience spans three decades.

Born in New Hampshire and raised in Vermont, Pam says she grew up gardening. Her mom raised enough produce in her garden to feed her family of eight year-round. “It took a lot of planning,” Pam said, and her mom would freeze their harvest rather than can it. Pam smiles as she remembers endlessly shucking peas.

In 1976, as graduate of the University of Vermont with a Bachelor of Science from the College of Agriculture & Life Science, Pam moved to Denver where she came to work at a local nursery. She volunteered at the Denver Botanical Garden (her first DBG!) and it was there that she first learned of the Master Gardener program. The volunteers she worked with raved about the program so she decided to try it. When she married and moved to California it was only natural for her to attend the Master Gardener course there as well and go on to help establish an herb farm. As a master gardener volunteer, she wrote weekly gardening columns for the local papers and held small plant clinics at local farmers’ markets.

Pam’s professional career included stints as an over-the-road tractor-trailer driver and a resort garden coordinator. Today, she continues to write, teach master gardener interns in the demonstration garden, and speak publicly on behalf of the Master Gardener Program. Pam is also the consummate historian. After our interview, I realized I could write another entire article on the history of the Maricopa County Master Gardening Program and the many people who have made it a success.

What does Pam like best about her role as a master gardener? “Watching gardeners grow,” she says. Her goal in the demonstration garden is to “empower people to go out and grow for themselves.” As for advice for new master gardeners, Pam suggests, “Find something you’re passionate about and do it. Try different things. Take a risk. Try the Help Desk. You’ll learn that you can look things up.” To sum it all up, Pam added, “We can teach them to garden or we can feed them.”
**April Design Charrette**

Our April design charrette will be at the home of Sherron Lentz on April 2, from 9 am–12 pm. Sherron lives in North Mesa. Experience is not necessary, so if you would like to learn some things about garden design, please consider joining us. We pair the less experienced with the experienced, so it is a great learning opportunity and a nice way to help a fellow Master Gardener while earning three education hours. All you need to bring is your imagination, paper, pencil and a dish to pass for our potluck lunch.

Sherron has this to say about her yard, “In 2002 my husband and I purchased a newly constructed home on a flat, bare-dirt ¾ acre lot in north Mesa. We have worked for years designing and building hardscape to create interesting topography. The hardscape includes stone and decorative block walls, paths meandering around nearly 40 planting gardens and 12 raised beds. Our goal for the design charrette is to gain knowledge and creative ideas for a predominately edible, pollinator-friendly, butterfly-friendly environment. It will be the crowning touch to the hardscape already in place.”

Email us at [designcharrette@hotmail.com](mailto:designcharrette@hotmail.com) if you would like to reserve a spot for Sherron’s charrette. Attendance is typically limited to twelve participants divided into teams of three people each.

If you are interested in getting design ideas for your garden and would like to put your garden on this season’s schedule, please email us at [designcharrette@hotmail.com](mailto:designcharrette@hotmail.com). We strongly recommend that you have previously attended a charrette before you schedule your own. Our last charrette of this season will be in May. We are currently looking for someone to host this charrette. So please contact us if you are interested.

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**What is a Design Charrette... And How Can I Participate?**

A design charrette is a forum hosted by a Master Gardener to develop design ideas for a chosen landscape. As a Master Gardener, you can host a charrette for your own property. This is a three-hour event that includes a tour of the grounds, potluck and design discussion. The number of attendees is usually limited to 12. Interns may host a charrette once they have attended one.

HOSTS: Receive the benefit of free design ideas. As the host, you will provide a tour of your property, which includes plant identification and information, researched or experimental. The host provides a letter of intent for the property that prioritizes goals, needs and problems to be solved. A simple drawing of the property must also be provided to the group to use in their landscape design. Lastly, the host provides cups, plates, utensils, napkins and water. Guests will bring the food.

GUESTS: No formal landscape design education is required. But we do require that you bring your imagination! Come; enjoy the garden tour, plant identification and the opportunity to learn from fellow Master Gardeners as we share our design ideas. Each guest will need to bring a potluck dish. Design charrettes are held on Saturday mornings and the host and Design Charrette team determines the date.

**Design Charrette Team:**

Sue Lanker, Suellen Seifert and Mitzi Maldonado

e-mail: [designcharrette@hotmail.com](mailto:designcharrette@hotmail.com)
BOOK REVIEW

How Plants Work: The Science Behind the Amazing Things Plants Do
by Linda Chalker-Scott, PhD

If you are interested in learning the science behind how plants work, then this is the book for you. You will neither be reading a botany textbook with individual chapters for each part of a plant, nor a plant physiology book discussing the various systems of a plant at their molecular and genetic levels. Instead, what you have is a book that will help you understand how plants work and how to keep them healthy in your garden.

To see what is different about this book, just take a look at the Table of Contents. There is no chapter on the root system, but you will find one on “The Underground Railroad.” You will not find a chapter on flowers blooming or in dormancy, but there is one on “How Plants Tell Time.” There’s nothing on reproduction either. Instead, look for the chapter on “Finding Love in Sedentary Places.” For those of you looking for a basic explanation of the C3 and C4 photosynthesis pathways and why our toughest summer weeds use the C4 pathway, then this is the book to read.

Do you think plant pigments are mainly involved with photosynthesis? Think again. While some are used as a cellular transport system, others act as a natural sunscreen and antioxidant.

Did you know that plants tell time via pigments? I didn’t. Phytochrome is a plant pigment that tells the plant if there is enough of the right kind of light for photosynthesis. A plant or flower that follows the sun is controlled by the pigment cryptochrome.

Did you ever wonder why vines twine around other plants or trellises? This is called thigmotropism. Simply put, it means that physical contact stimulates vines to grow and attach themselves to any nearby structure.

These are just a few of the interesting scientific facts contained in the pages of this book. It is written in an informal style, based on solid science, and I think that anyone who reads it will come away with something that will make them a better Master Gardener. This book is a keeper for your reference library.

Dr. Chalker-Scott, PhD, is the Washington State University extension urban horticulturist. She is also an associate professor in the Department of Horticulture as well as having affiliate associate professor status at the University of Washington. Don Sutton recommended this book and I’m glad that he did.
A Traveling Gardener
Wandering, Wondering, Noticing... Chihuly’s Garden

written by LINDA LARSON | photos by RICH LARSON

If you find yourself visiting downtown Seattle, hop on board the monorail and ride directly to Seattle Center. Located on 74 acres, it is home to the Space Needle, arguably the most iconic image from the 1962 Seattle World’s Fair. You will also find the Pacific Science Center designed to inspire budding scientists of all ages, the 3D IMAX theatre celebrating the 100th anniversary of the National Parks, the Music Center playing the history of rock and roll, and the International Fountain inviting you in for a splash.

The most recent addition to Seattle Center is the creation of glass artist Dale Chihuly and landscape designer Richard Hartledge. I was in attendance when Richard Hartledge spoke about the project at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show in 2012. They have transformed an asphalt parking lot under the Space Needle into the Chihuly Garden and Glass Museum. Since its opening, Dale Chihuly’s worldwide popularity has been drawing in visitors to enjoy the startlingly beautiful glass exhibition, but the name of this place is Garden and Glass, with the emphasis on garden.

Chihuly has staged 11 garden installations around the world with our own Desert Botanical Garden hosting his work twice. The Garfield Park Conservatory in Chicago, de Young Museum in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park, Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis, and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew near London are some of the gardens where his mesmerizing creations have been displayed. Chihuly has a heartfelt connection to gardening. His mother was a gardener with 90 azaleas in her garden. As a child he and his mother were very close, and according to Hartledge, this formative connection to gardens has inspired his work. The very shapes and structures he creates connect with the colors and shapes of plants. The garden design comes first. Then Chihuly draws inspiration from the plants for his glass art. As the seasons change, the light transforms the plants, and conversely, the plants transform the glass.

Hartledge tells a story recalling the construction phase of Garden and Glass. He would be proceeding with the plant design and Chihuly would come in to see the plants. Then he would go off and redesign the glass to be used in the garden. Every day was a collaboration and a surprise between the garden and the glass creations designed to enhance it. Dale Chihuly has said, “I want my work to appear like it came from nature, so that if someone found it on a beach or in the forest, they might think it belonged there.”
The garden has a glass house filled with colorful glass flowers suspended from the ceiling. Chihuly had long studied and admired the old Victorian style garden conservatories and he wanted to have one in his garden. He went on to design his conservatory with a contemporary shape and a nod to the futuristic architecture of the Space Needle. From inside you can look directly up at the Space Needle. The glass spheres in the garden reflect the needle on their surfaces. According to Hartledge, the garden was designed to have eight exterior projects but it all blends together so seamlessly that I find it hard to separate them.

Inside the exhibition Chihuly’s work is perfection without a speck of dust to be seen on the black glass stage. One obvious feature is the enormous glass tree located on a rise at the far end of the conservatory. The small hill is planted with black mondo grass mimicking a forest floor. There is clearly a section of cool colored glass, blues with a touch of yellow, and another section of hot reds and oranges. Tall reeds, spheres, twisting leaves, large chunks, and spiky towers complete the scene.

I have visited this garden twice. On my first visit in February of 2014, the plants were sparkling with frost and later that day it snowed. The plants were stunning. During the short days of winter the lights came on late in the day and the entire exhibition in the conservatory and garden is lit. On my most recent visit, the flowers were bursting into bloom. The garden is maturing and the plants are integrating beautifully with the glass. A great feature of this garden is that the exterior exhibition will always be changing as the plants put on a show.

In a condensed space you can see the full range of Chihuly’s lifetime of work. As visitors stand entranced, it is easy to see why they might use up all of their allotted time inside, but the guides urge them out into the garden. As I was leaving, the young man taking tickets at the entrance inquired, “Did you see the garden?” I smiled and replied, “Oh yes, that is why I came.” And that is why you should go too.

Linda Larson is an advocate for the importance of public green space and the value of nature in our lives. She writes as “A Traveling Gardener, wandering, wondering, noticing...” http://travelinggardener.com/wordpress/

She is a lifelong lover of flowers, Master Gardener, and gardener in Mesa, AZ for over 30 years. One of her earliest memories is of daffodils lining the small stone path to her grandmother’s door. Personally visiting hundreds of gardens in many parts of the world, she shares her insight and discoveries entertaining readers and audiences. She will be speaking at the Northwest Flower Show and the San Francisco Flower Show this spring.
WHAT IS ALGAE?

Algae, according to Life Sciences & Allied Applications/Biology, are unicellular or multi-cellular organisms formerly classified as plants. Algae can occur in either fresh or salt water as well as on moist ground.

It has chlorophyll and other pigments but lacks true stems, roots, and leaves. Algae, which are now regarded as protoctista, include seaweeds, diatoms, and spirogyra.

WHY IS THERE ALGAE IN MY PHOENIX POND?

Not everyone is excited about the presence of algae in their backyard pond. If you have a living pond with plants and fish, algae is going to insist on being a part of your ecosystem, especially in the winter months when other plants are dormant.

The fact of the matter is when the growth rate of algae is controlled, it’s a beneficial part of your ecosystem and helps maintain healthy water quality through several functions. It consumes nitrate from the water, it acts as forage for your koi and goldfish, it softens the look of the rocks in the pond, and it acts as a condominium for a healthy zoo plankton culture which ironically competes with the algae for nutrients in the water column. That’s just a partial list of pond ecosystem benefits. Have you heard about universities making biological jet fuel using algae grown in test tubes? Maybe soon we can power our cars with it!

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THE ALGAE IN MY PHOENIX POND?

We know that algae can grow out of control and make our ponds and streams unsightly. Once it starts growing beyond just fuzzy rocks and becomes filamentatious algae that exceeds a couple of inches in length, many people prefer to take action to stop its growth.

Once your plants start growing aggressively they will take up much of the nutrients in the water and effectively starve the algae into submission. However, there are more aggressive methods of ridding yourself of this aquatic weed.

The cheapest method is to simply remove it by hand and use it in your garden. You can compost it or use it as natural mulch around plants such as roses. It’s very nutrient-rich. If you don’t want to hand-weed, you can use a water treatment product to break it up or starve it out — just make sure you clean your skimmer basket often during this process!
WHY CAN’T I JUST USE AN ALGAECIDE IN MY PHOENIX POND?

PLEASE don’t go to the pet store or pool supply and buy an algaecide!

While it will kill the algae, consider what happens when it dies and sinks to the bottom of your pond. What do you suppose happens to dead plant material on the bottom of your pond? It becomes food for more algae and other less-than-desirable anaerobic processes that will foul your pond water. Once you resort to chemistry to control your algae problem, you’ve created a chemically-dependent water feature. So you must ask yourself if you got into this hobby for love of aquatic plants, amphibians, dragonflies, and fish or the love of water chemistry. The choice is yours.

For more information on algae control and general pond maintenance, you can visit the blog on www.PondGnome.com.
OKRA: Vegetable of the Month for April

written by NATALIE GAGNON

As the warm spring weather arrives, we look forward to the upcoming bloom of the Sonoran desert. Although desert flowers are a magnificent sight, there are some impressive flowers in the vegetable garden as well. One of the showiest is the okra flower and April is the month to plant it.

Originally from Africa, okra is a traditional southern plant that thrives in warm weather. Easy-to-grow okra is rich in vitamin A and low in calories. It is a versatile vegetable that can be fried, grilled, pickled, roasted, sautéed, or stewed. Okra has many names, including ladies’ fingers, bhendi, bhindi, bamia, ochro, and gumbo.

A flowering plant in the mallow family, okra puts on a show in the summer as its creamy yellow flowers bring a touch of color to the vegetable garden. The blooms, which resemble hibiscus, are followed by tender pods and although it is a vegetable, the prominent main trunk of okra gives it a tree-like appearance.

Okra should be planted in the sunniest spot in your garden when the soil has warmed to 65 to 70 °F. Mix compost into the soil before planting or work in a slow-release fertilizer such as 4-6-6 or 19-19-19 and make sure the soil drains well. Place the seeds in the soil 1/2 to 1 inch deep and 1 to 2 feet apart. Soaking the seeds overnight in tepid water may speed up germination. Okra grows best in soil with a near-neutral pH between 6.5 and 7.0. Seeds can also be started indoors in peat pots under full light three to four weeks before the last spring frost date.

If you are planting okra transplants, space them 1 to 2 feet apart to give them room to grow. Okra seedlings have fragile taproots that cannot be broken. Thoroughly water your seedlings an hour before you plant them. Plant them about 1/2 inch deeper than they grew in their pots. Water them right away if rain is not expected but let the soil warm up for a few days before mulching. When the seedlings are about 3 inches tall, thin the plants to 10 to 18 inches apart. Although okra is a drought-tolerant vegetable, if you want good growth and production you will need to water at least an inch per week.

The first crop will be ready about 2 months after planting when the pods are 2 to 3 inches long. Harvest okra every other day, as the pods get tough and stringy when left on the plant. To harvest, cut the stem just above the cap with a knife. If the stem is too hard to cut, the pod is probably too old and should be discarded. Wear gloves and long sleeves when cutting the okra because most varieties have leaves covered with tiny spines that can irritate your skin. Okra is a “cut-and-come-again” vegetable, so keep cutting the pods every day or two and it will keep on producing. After the first harvest, remove the lower leaves to help speed up production. Place uncut, uncooked pods in bags and store them in the freezer and you can then prepare them any way you like at a later date.

Okra pests include aphids, corn earworms, fire ants, flea beetles, Japanese beetles, root knot nematodes, and stink bugs. If the weather turns cool, fusarium and/or verticillium wilt can kill okra plants.
Fried Okra

Makes 2 lbs; enough for 6 to 8 people as a side dish and 12 people for snacking.
121 calories per 1/2 cup serving.
Time: 30 minutes.

Ingredients:

4 cups peanut or canola oil
2 large eggs, beaten
3/4 cup whole milk
2 cups stone-ground cornmeal
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1 1/2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
2 pounds fresh okra, sliced into 1/6 inch-thick rounds (about 7 cups)
Crushed red pepper flakes to taste (optional)
Sea salt to taste (optional)

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 225 °F.
2. Heat the oil in a 12-inch cast-iron skillet or a 3-quart enameled cast-iron casserole until the temperature on a candy thermometer reads 375 °F.
3. In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs and milk until they are well combined, about 1 minute. In a medium bowl, sift the cornmeal, flour, salt, and pepper together twice to create a “dredge.” Add the okra to the egg mixture and toss until it is evenly coated. Scatter half the dredge over the okra and toss to coat. Scatter the remaining dredge over the okra and toss again.
4. Transfer about one-third of the okra to the oil with a slotted spoon and fry in batches, turning as necessary with the spoon, until the slices are golden brown all over, about 2 minutes per batch.
5. Using the slotted spoon, transfer the okra to a plate lined with a double thickness of paper towels. When it has drained, transfer to a ceramic serving dish that holds heat well and place in the oven until ready to serve.
6. Dust the okra with red pepper flakes and sea salt, if desired, and pass a cruet of pepper vinegar around the table when you serve.