Events & Activities

There will be no MG Assoc. meeting in July, the next meeting will be in August in Cottonwood.

Yavapai Rose Society - For more information call Bob or Nancy at 771-9300,

Alta Vista Gardening Club, Prescott, fourth Tuesday of the month, 12:30pm. Call 928-443-0464 for location and information.

Prescott Area Gourd Society-there is no meeting in July.

Pond Club-this is an informal group that meets every couple of months, usually the 3rd week. Email aquaticgardens@esedona.net for more information.

The Organic Gardening Club meets on the 2rd Saturday of the month, 10845 Cornville, Call 649-6099 for information.

Prescott Orchid Society, meets 3rd Sunday of the month, 2pm at the Prescott Library, call Cynthia for information. (928) 717-0623

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Locoweed

You’ve heard the stories I’m sure—tales of horses and cows going mad after eating locoweed. Well, it’s true. The hardy little locoweed can poison livestock, although there are a few species that make good forage for livestock. Locoweeds are members of the pea family, with the typical pea flower. Other names for the plant are milk vetch and rattleweed. It’s Latin name, Astragalus, is derived from Greek from a word meaning anklebone, the plural of which means dice. Hang in there, the meaning will come clear in a minute! It probably refers to the seeds rattling in their seed pods, which they do—rattle, that is. Think of a couple of dice in your hand as you shake them. Ancient Greeks apparently used anklebones (whose I haven’t a clue) as dice, ie., bones, which even modern day gamblers use to refer to dice. Now aren’t you glad you hung in there. The world can be an interesting, complex and strangely interconnected place.

Locoweed does grow in Yavapai county. I see it along one of the roads I walk here in Camp Verde. The variety I see is Astragalus mollissimus, a native variety with beautiful purple-red, almost iridescent blooms. Other varieties of locoweed can have a wide range of colors. They can range from white & yellow, red, to different shades of purple depending on the species. One of the most spectacular is the red-flowered locoweed, Astragalus coccineus. It has large scarlet flowers with silvery gray foliage and is found in Arizona.

The leaves are compound leaves with tiny leaflets, usually a dozen or more on a stem. Some species can grow to two feet across including A. mollissimus. It forms a compact mound. In spite of their toxic qualities, they can be used as landscape plants. They remain neat and tidy and after the flowers bloom they leave inter-
esting seed pods. The pods are generally large bladder-shaped things that come in different colors also. Different species, different pods. Some are large and green, others have red streaks, others pinkish, and there are even fuzzy pods. There are other interesting features to the pods, but they mostly appeal to more hard-core botanical types, so I’ll leave that information for you to find out if you really need to know. (For the taxominists in the group, seed pods are key to identifying different species.)

The way locoweeds poison livestock isn’t entirely understood, but it is thought to have something to do with the amounts of selenium the plant picks up from the soil. Toxic levels may accumulate in the plant. Also involved are nitrogen-containing sugar compounds called nitroglycosides and potent alkaloids. The more toxic the plant, the stronger the smell. Apparently, as the plant accumulates selenium the odor gradually becomes foul smelling. The smell can linger for years, even in herbarium collections. Selenium levels can grow as high as 10,000 parts per million.

The majority of poisonous species also contain nitroglycosides. This toxin, when ingested, converts into another very toxic chemical called NPA. There is a lot more scientific stuff I can put here, but the bottom line is that this chemical can cause acute livestock poisoning. Symptoms of locoweed poisoning are general weakness and loss of neural control, convulsions, blindness, coma and death. There is even a species that can cause death in honeybees!

Still more animal poisonings occur when two swainsonine alkaloids are present. When cattle or horses eat the plant, it causes the animals to act “wild and crazy.” The animal suffers from a staggering gait and lack of muscular coordination, followed by difficulty eating or drinking, paralysis and then death. Animals can also lose their depth perception, causing them to run into fences or fall into ponds, ravines and holes. It does take repeated ingestion of the plant to cause the symptoms, so if you have a plant or two in a pasture it would not be an immediate problem.

Locoweeds are found all over the world, but it is in the western United States where they occur most frequently and have the greatest variety of species. In spite of their reputation as being dangerous plants, several species are actually good forage for livestock and other species are used for industrial purposes and the Chinese use the root of one species as an herbal remedy. A thickening agent called gum tragacanth comes from a species from the eastern Mediterranean and Southwestern Asia, while Huang Ch'i, a famous Chinese healing herb, comes from the root of one species. Small changes in the chemical composition of the plants can shift it from benign to dangerous.

It is really an attractive plant and, depending on where you live, might work in your landscape. The native range of Astragalus mollissimus is from 3300 to 7000 feet. The plant blooms in early summer. (It blooms in early June in Camp Verde.) It is very drought tolerant, likes a well-drained soil and full sun, although it will be fine with some light shade. The flowers I’ve described but the foliage is attractive also, being fuzzy and soft silver-gray-green. It has interesting seed pods that are a bonus. Use it for a border, as it only grows about a foot high, and in butterfly gardens, as they love the flowers. The flowers have a heavy sweet odor. Combine it with something like the grass purple three-awn for an attractive combination.
Our MG Association President, Rosh Preuss, is the highlighted MG this month. Rosh is a Minnesota native and fondly remembers her mother’s fabulous flower gardens, which sparked her interest in gardening as a young child. With her mother’s encouragement, Rosh, at age 5, planted sweet peas in the family garden. The sweet peas were so beautiful that she entered a bouquet in a competition at the local community fair—and won the blue ribbon! It’s still one of her favorite keepsakes to this day, and, most likely, this was her “green moment”!

Rosh attended the University of Minnesota, followed by a successful career in sales and marketing. Her job with AT&T-Unisource, a telecommunications company, based her in the Netherlands, where she lived for 6 years. She and her husband, Matt, were married in the Netherlands—during tulip season—with 23 American friends and family in attendance, along with many Dutch friends.

In 2000, Rosh and her husband left the Netherlands for Sedona, and she became a MG 2 years later. Answering the hotline is her favorite way to share her MG skills with others. “People are so grateful to have someone to talk to about their gardening issues,” Rosh says, and finds it a valuable learning experience for her, as well. In her own home landscape, Rosh has left the native natural plants and prefers to concentrate on the pots and plantings around her pool and courtyard. In choosing plants, her motto is “everything for beauty—and nothing practical”!

Besides her gardening, Rosh finds time for golf, swimming, yoga, reading, cooking and entertaining. Trips to Minnesota several times a year to visit her mother and sister are also a high priority for her.

It’s obvious that Rosh enjoys being a MG and has done an outstanding job as our Association President for the past 2 years. In her words, “It’s been a great way to make friends with similar interests and gardeners tend to care about the environment, health and beauty in nature—gardeners are just good people”!

### Iris Rhizome Sale at Sharlot Hall August 6

The Prescott Area Iris Society will be holding their annual rhizome sale on Saturday, August 6 at Sharlot Hall Museum. The sale begins at 10 a.m. Sharlot Hall Museum is located at 415 W. Gurley, Prescott; the activity takes place under the canopy, near the blacksmith shop, and is usually a pretty fast sell-out.

The rhizome sale is the group’s major fund-raiser; proceeds support the programs of the local society, which is an affiliate of the American Iris Society.

The group could really use more rhizomes for their sale. Mid to late July is the best time for dividing iris in the tri-city area. They hope you will donate excess rhizomes from your digging activity to the Iris Society, so the beauty of iris is shared with others. Also encourage neighbors and friends to contribute rhizomes.

After dividing your iris, place each variety in a separate paper bag with the name of the iris, if known, and a color description written clearly on the bag. Although donations of named iris are preferred any iris you wish to contribute will be accepted and appreciated.

If you can donate rhizomes, please call Bonnie Haughton 445-4357 or Judy Book 776-7217 by July 27 for details.
Early on Saturday morning, May 14th, eight Master Gardeners met at Sal Sorrentino’s home to work their magic.

Sal had been diagnosed with lung cancer in the fall of 2004 and had surgery in December. He had not been able to work on his yard for over five months before his death on April 30th. His family came from out of state and did what they could in the limited time they had to share some last precious time with their Dad and to do some things for him around the house and yard.

But, working on two rugged acres in Prescott is a lot different from working on the suburban landscapes of their homes, and so expert help was needed. Mary Barnes, Missy Sandeen, Beverly Turnbull, Kelly Davis, Bill Cart, Art Filippino, Kathy Grant-Lilley and Leslie Lutey were joined by four of Sal’s immediate neighbors to get things in order.

Mary Barnes led the Master Gardeners around the property, showing them the various tasks that could be tackled. And tackle they did: transplanted trees to larger pots for the deck; planted numerous small pots of ground cover in the designated areas; weeded, weeded, and weeded; used weed eaters over and around rugged and steep ground strewn with rocks and “too-numerous-to-count” trees that Sal had planted.

The team flowed seamlessly from area to area, from job to job. Mary, Sal’s wife, was in Wisconsin for the family memorial service for Sal on that day. She left a refrigerator stocked with cold drinks for the volunteers. They were much appreciated because the day had started slightly overcast but finished with the sun burning brightly hot. Mary also extended an invitation to enjoy the scenery from the deck. What a view! It was recalled how proud Sal was of his home, his wife Mary, and his dogs, Tilley, and the well-known Lucy. The dogs were on hand to visit, with much tail wagging and barks of welcome.

But the view led the expert gardeners’ eyes to other weedy spots in need of attention, and so back to work! Weed eater spools were refilled, tanks refueled, and hats resettled as the group went to do new tasks. So many
bags were filled with weeds that the entire neighborhood gave space in their trash containers for the garden debris.

Mary Sorrentino returned home late the following Tuesday night. When she walked out of her door Wednesday and looked at her yard, she burst into tears. It looked just like it did when Sal was home and well!

Now, that is the highest praise, for to know Sal was to know someone with high standards that would not be compromised.

He respected all of you and appreciated your talents and abilities. He was very grateful that his fellow Master Gardeners would come to his place to help get it in order for his wife, Mary, after a long, wet winter.

Thank you, all of you!

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**Master Gardeners’ Involvement at VVMC**

Yavapai County Master Gardeners are volunteering their time and talents to beautify Cottonwood’s Verde Valley Medical Center garden areas and entry ways. Rick Peterson, VP of Support Services at VVMC, contacted the Yavapai County Extension Office in Cottonwood to seek help with planning and planting the various garden areas in and around the mile square facility which currently has only one full time gardener on staff. Master Gardeners Jeannette Teets and Dr. Paul Schnur offered to create a landscaping plan and recruited fellow Master Gardeners to help implement the plan. The Tranquility Garden, Rose Garden, and both entry ways have already been completed, with work to begin shortly on the “Mingus Patios”. Plants selected by Jeannette Teets and Dr. Schnur are provided by Verde Valley Medical Center, and groups of Master Gardeners have spent several work sessions installing them. Coincidentally, Master Gardener Dr. Paul Schnur is also the longest on-staff physician at VVMC. Rick Peterson’s vision for the future is that each of the completed areas be “adopted” by VVMC volunteers to be maintained into the future, and that has already become a reality for the Tranquility Garden and Rose Garden.

*Jeanette Teets & Paul Schnur*
Stone Stepping Stones

One of the simplest things to make to spice up your gardening is your own stepping stones. It just takes a little time (mostly for creative purposes) and someone to lift a bag of cement and help mix it, if you’re lucky.

Supply list:
- selection of pebbles or other interesting items
- large sheet of paper
- 4 lengths of 1x2 lumber, cut and made into a frame, any size you want
- piece of plastic or acrylic
- protective gloves
- cement (quick crete is a good choice for this project)
- large bucket or wheel barrow to mix cement in

1. Make your frame.
2. Mark the size of your frame (inside dimensions) on your paper. Lay out a design that you like. Do this somewhere near where you are going to work with the cement, as you are going to move the pieces from the design to the cement.
3. Cover the work surface with the plastic or acrylic. Put the frame in the center. Mix the cement; wear gloves as cement is very alkaline. Fill the frame with cement almost to the top.
4. Press the cement firmly into the corners and smooth the surface.
5. Transfer the pebbles from your design into the same arrangement in the cement. Press each into place.
6. Free the frame from the slab by banging it firmly on a hard surface. Repeat this process to make as many as you need.
MG Association News

Put SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17th on your calendar for the MGA ANNUAL PICNIC & AWARDS. This year it will be held in Prescott at Thumb Butte Nat’l Forest Picnic Grounds. It will be held from 11:00 am ‘til 3:00 pm.

MGA will provide meat, drinks, paper goods and utensils. You will be asked to bring a side dish or dessert.

Besides good eating and congratulating our volunteers on a terrific job they do, you can hike the many trails, play volley ball and also get native plant information.

This is for everyone. Spouses and children are most welcome!

Call Eunice at 928-771-9559 to let us know how many in your family are going to attend.

A map will be given out at the August Meeting for our Verde Valley members.

FROM THE EDITOR: Please send or email articles and announcements to the address below. Long articles will go in as soon as possible, announcements must be in by the 15th of the month to be included.

Nora Graf
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Camp Verde, AZ 86322
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July 6 is the last day for getting your hours in for the year. Please use the website to quickly report your hours or get them mailed to Mary Barnes at the Cooperative Extension office in Prescott.

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MG Association Meeting:

There is no meeting in July.

August 17, Cottonwood
6:30pm
Speaker: Dawn Sutherland, Butterfly Gardening

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