

Garden Thyme



Monthly Newsletter of the East Central Alabama Master Gardeners Association

May-June, 2015

Musings from Jack ...

After you get the fire ants out of their mounds you have: an aerated, fertilized, well defined, deeply worked area for a plant!

Ascension Island was another area that was practically destroyed by man's enterprise. A Darwin protégé imported colonizing flora and fauna and actually made it better than it was.

My book recommendation *General Points Concerning Fruit Tree Stocks...* Various Authors

Jack



SIFAT

Tuesday's weather was perfect for our tour of SIFAT - blue skies and lots of sunshine. Twelve of our members gathered and met with John Carr for what was a very educational, enlightening morning. We saw where clay bricks are made for indoor ovens/stoves and the gardens where LOTS of food is grown for the dining hall there on campus. There were different planting methods than we see here but after seeing them you think of the possibilities for folks with limited space. We learned about drying leaves of plants and making a powder of them for nutritional use in second and third world countries. We toured the Slum and learned about the 48 Slum Experience where folks come and stay 48 hours there in the slum dwellings with no electricity or water or any of the daily comforts we take for granted. From there we toured the third world area where we saw the standard housing available in areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Included in most of the houses was a place for the family's animals. In the housing in Nepal there is a place for the yaks built directly below the house so heat from the animals can help heat the house. All-in-all it was a great time of fellowship and education. Many thanks to Alyce Johnson for setting this tour up for us.



vertical garden



Urban slum



Clay brick stoves/ovens



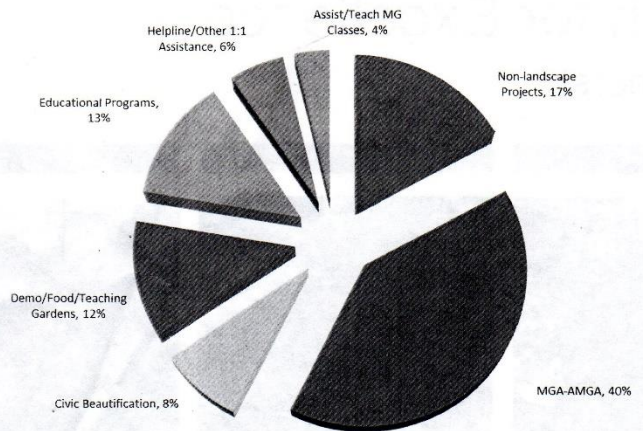
Photos by Sheila Bolen



Nepal home

- Active Certified Master Gardeners: **1,393**
- Interns trained: **431**
- Total hours volunteered: **203,269**
- Number of clientele contacted: **1,550,136**
- Equivalent to **65** full time employees in education outreach programs

2014 MG Volunteers' Report



Stats provided by Kerry Smith

Not Just a Ditch Lily

Question: I have a delightful neighbor who has lived in this area all her life; she regales me with stories about old landscapes, old homes, and old plants. One plant in particular she describes with affection and passion is called a "ditch lily". I've done a little reading regarding this lily since my plan was to find and install them in my yard. Is this a good idea? Am I asking for trouble by introducing this plant? Is it considered a delight or a demon?

Answer: Whether your "delightful" neighbor explained or not, the "ditch lily", also called day lily, tiger lily, roadside lily, and a few other names, is one of a group that fell out of favor with more "discerning" gardeners some years back. Because of their low maintenance, friendly nature, and ability to spread from one spot to another sans human intervention, some circles have bestowed on them "invasive species" status.

But before you abandon the idea of adding them to your yard, let's take a closer look at *Hemerocallis*, the lily's "proper" or botanical name.

Sometimes considered "pass along" or "friendship plants", these colorful harbingers of summer originally hailed from Asia, where they were a staple of Chinese diets for many years. Arriving in the New World with our first colonists, daylilies quickly spread across North America, as determined as our ancestors to stake a claim and establish new territory.

Even then we knew this was not a true lily; true lilies grow from bulbs, the daylily from tuberous roots. But, from its early days, daylilies were known for those characteristics that made it popular in its native environment.

To "tough as nails", add tenacious. Daylilies in landscapes offer a range of colors, sizes, and periods of bloom. As example, some designers use daylilies to fill gaps in the landscape, border a sidewalk, or to hide unattractive items

such as air conditioning units. Requiring minimal maintenance once established, they tolerate a range of soil and temperature conditions although they look their best in full to filtered sun and with their "feet" in soil that drains well.

Massed on banks and areas too steep or hard to mow, daylilies also add 'bling' to foundation plantings; some color combinations can be down-right eye-popping! In addition to *Hemerocallis fulva*, the "common" ditch lily, there is a bewildering list of lily possibilities, including night-blooming and a lemon-scented species. Colors, as mentioned previously, come in shades of white, yellow, pink, purple, and striking combinations of any and all. Cultivars also include a range of bloom times, so though "day" lily indicates just that – a flower that blooms for a day – by combining early, mid, and late blooming types, daylilies can be enjoyed the entire summer.

Mix color options, bloom time, height variations, and flower shapes to understand how there are thousands of named cultivars around today. Choose from one or more categories to delve even deeper into the daylily of ditches and devotees, since a few cultivars have price tags equal to the down payment on a new car!

Is this plant a delight or a demon? Depends on who you ask, but as suggested by one expert, 'if you have a patch of bad yard that won't grow anything, try daylilies. Chances are they will do the job and look good in the process'.

written by Sallie Lee of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES). She is housed at the C. Beaty Hanna Horticultural and Environmental Center, which is based at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

Our sincere condolences to Tiffany Moore on the recent loss of her father, Bobby Moore.
Please remember the Moore family in your prayers.

- Some curious beliefs from years gone by: Dried dill was once hung from the outsides of doors and windows to protect those inside from witches. - Fennel was said to be eaten by serpents to improve their eyesight, making it easier to attack their victims. - In the 9th century, drinking horehound tea was said to protect that person from the bites of mad dogs.
- During the War Between the States, doctors in the Union army routinely used onion juice to clean gunshot wounds, and General Grant, deprived of it, sent a testy memo to the War Department: "I will not move my troops without onions!"
- How long have people enjoyed the flavor of sauerkraut? When the Chinese were building the fifteen hundred mile long Great Wall of China, they sustained themselves on cabbage pickled in wine.
- Back in the late 19th century some towns in England had laws that reduced a person's taxes if he planted flowers and shrubbery in his yard to beautify it. If the person next to him did not do the same, his taxes were raised. With these laws, the towns became attractive for visitors and towns folk alike.
- According to Greek mythology, one could break the magical spells of sorcerers by drinking a tonic made with horehound leaves. Today, a tea made with horehound and honey can be used to ease the pain of a sore throat.
- Peas have come a long way to the tender, sweet varieties that we enjoy today. Archaeological findings suggest that early man ate peas that were roasted over open flames and peeled, similar to the way we eat chestnuts today!
- Fennel is one of our oldest cultivated plants and was much used by the Romans. Gladiators consumed fennel prior to battle to make them fierce, while Roman women ate fennel to prevent obesity.
- In 1983, New York Transit officials dusted ground hot pepper on subway token slots to prevent rambunctious teenagers from sucking tokens out of the turnstiles.
- The herb feverfew was grown by Charlemagne in his botanical gardens. During his reign (800-814 A.D.), it was used by the Romans to reduce fevers, and as a sleep aid.
- During the seventeenth century, the radish was used for a variety of "so called" medicinal purposes. It was used as a general antidote for poisoning, a cure for snake bites, to alleviate the pain of child birth and to remove freckles. When mashed, and then mixed with honey and dried sheep's blood, it was reported to cure baldness!
- There are over 350 varieties of ladybugs in the world. These beneficial insects have big appetites, with both the larvae and adult ladybugs devouring many harmful insects each day.
- In the "good old days", hollyhocks were often grown around the outhouse. The tall flowers helped hide the unsightly structure, while the fragrant blooms acted as a natural air freshener. Today these flowers are grown along fences, driveways and as a background plant in the flower garden.
- Did you know that on the average, each American consumes over 30 pounds of lettuce every year!

<http://heirloomseeds.com/trivia/>

Augie Sanchez
June 1st

may your birthday bring
you as much happiness
as you give to everyone
who knows you
Happy Birthday

Charlie Partin
June 18th

Fennel

by Gary and Janet Smith

In answer to the question, "Will we also feature primarily medicinal herbs in future articles?" the answer is, "Yes, but not until we have covered most of the primarily culinary ones." Please note we responded with "most" not "all" because there are many herbs that are quite obscure, especially to the western palate. We also used the term "primarily" because it is difficult to imagine any herb that cannot be consumed, and even more difficult to imagine any herb that has no medicinal properties.

All that is true of this month's featured herb, fennel. Fennel is a perennial, pleasant-smelling herb with yellow flowers. It is native to the Mediterranean, but is now found throughout the world. Dried fennel seeds are often used in cooking as an anise-flavored spice. But don't confuse fennel with anise; though they look and taste similar, they are not the same.

Often mistaken for celery or dill, fennel is a true original. All parts of the plant (the bulb, stalk, and feathery fronds) are edible.

The Greek name for fennel is *marathon* (μάραθρον) or *marathos* (μάραθος), and the place of the famous battle of Marathon (whence Marathon, the subsequent sports event), literally means a plain with fennels. The word "fennel" developed from the Middle English *fenel* or *fenyl*. This came from the Old English *fenol* or *finol*, which in turn came from the Latin *feniculum* or *foeniculum*, the diminutive of *fenum* or *faenum*, meaning "hay".

Most fennel recipes call for just the white bulb, which is typically cored and sliced or chopped, depending on the preparation. When thinly sliced, the fennel bulb is great in salads -- it's crunchy and slightly sweet and subtly licorice-like, but not as pungent as licorice root or black licorice candy.

But don't ignore the stalks and fronds. The stalks can be used to make stock, or chopped and sautéed with other vegetables in a mirepoix (a typical French blend of onion, celery and carrot) for a soup or stew. The fronds can be added to salads or chopped and used to garnish dishes.

Fennel enjoys cool weather—not hot, but not freezing. Although it's easy to germinate from seeds sown directly into the garden after the soil has warmed, transplants are helpful to get a head start in spring or in raising a fall crop that must be started in the heat of summer. It takes about three months for fennel to produce the bulb, so do the math to determine when you need to start and if you have enough time before the weather turns hot or starts freezing.

Improved varieties have been introduced in recent years. Try Zefa Fino or Trieste. They resist the urge to flower, channeling their energy into the bulb instead.

The health benefits of fennel include relief from anemia, indigestion, flatulence, constipation, colic, diarrhea, respiratory disorders, menstrual disorders, and has benefits regarding eye care.

Fennel, which has the scientific name *Foeniculum Vulgare* Miller, or its essence, is widely used around the world in mouth fresheners, toothpastes, desserts, antacids and in various culinary applications.

Fennel is another herb listed by The George Mateljan Foundation as one of "the world's healthiest foods." Like many of its fellow spices, fennel contains its own unique combination of phytonutrients including the flavonoids rutin, quercetin, and various kaempferol glycosides—that give it strong antioxidant activity. The phytonutrients in fennel extracts compare favorably in research studies to BHT (butylated hydroxytoluene), a potentially toxic antioxidant commonly added to processed foods.

The most fascinating phytonutrient compound in fennel, however, may be anethole—the primary component of its volatile oil. In animal studies, the anethole in fennel has repeatedly been shown to reduce inflammation and to help prevent the occurrence of cancer. Researchers have also proposed a biological mechanism that may explain these anti-inflammatory and anticancer effects. This mechanism involves the shutting down of a intercellular signaling system called tumor necrosis factor (or TNF)-mediated signaling. By shutting down this signaling process, the anethole in fennel prevents activation of a potentially strong gene-altering and inflammation-triggering molecule called NF-kappaB. The volatile oil has also been shown to be able to protect the liver of experimental animals from toxic chemical injury.

In addition to its unusual phytonutrients, fennel bulb is an excellent source of vitamin C. Vitamin C is the body's primary water-soluble antioxidant, able to neutralize free radicals in all aqueous environments of the body.



photo - ucanr.edu



photo - livestrong.com



photo-y pixshark.com

If left unchecked, these free radicals cause cellular damage that results in the pain and joint deterioration that occurs in conditions like osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

The vitamin C found in fennel bulb is directly antimicrobial and is also needed for the proper function of the immune system.

Additionally, fennel is a good source of fiber. Consuming it may help reduce cholesterol. The fiber also removes potentially carcinogenic toxins from the colon. Fennel is also a very good source of folate, a B vitamin and potassium.

There are several varieties of Fennel fruit known in commerce - sweet or Roman Fennel, German or Saxon Fennel, wild or bitter Fennel, Galician Russian and Roumanian Fennel, Indian, Persian and Japanese. The fruits vary very much in length, breadth, taste and other characters, and are of very different commercial value.

Plant fennel seeds or transplants in a sunny, well-drained bed that has been amended with compost. Thin seedlings to stand about 12 inches apart. Keep the bed moist, and be sure to feed your fennel every two to three weeks with a liquid fertilizer.

Some suggestions for using fennel are as follows:

- Cauliflower and Fennel with Coriander Vinaigrette
- Fennel and Orange Salad
- Potato and Fennel Bake
- Fennel and Leek Risotto
- Fennel Gratin
- Fennel with Blood Orange and Grated Zucchini
- Fennel with Avocado Salad
- Fennel and Mint Salad (imagine that after a day in the sun)
- Fennel Salad With Lemon
- Pear Fennel Walnut Salad

Look to the Weeds

by Diana Barker

(When I came across this article it instantly caught my attention. I read it and thought it would be a good article for the newsletter. To make a long story short, it took quite some time for me to get it into this format. I know it's a long article but I truly believe the information is worthwhile. Sheila)

Gardeners and farmers constantly battle with the weeds, but weeds can have a useful purpose. Weeds can be used as a soil indicator. Simply by observing the most prevalent weeds that are growing in a specific area, they can indicate if the soil is acidic or alkaline, whether the soil is a healthy, balanced soil, or if it's depleted. Weeds can indicate a poorly draining soil, or a soil that is unable to retain moisture. Weeds can even indicate if the soil is unbalanced, being overly rich in one nutrient and deficient in others.

When using weeds as a soil indicator, observe several of the most prevalent types of weeds to get an accurate soil assessment. For example, the dandelion and common mullein both indicate an acidic soil, but common mullein can also mean a low fertility soil, so if you see it alone, it could mean several things, but seeing it along with dandelions would indicate an acidic soil.

Pay attention also to the health of the weeds, a healthy stand of clover could indicate a soil that lacks nitrogen, while the same weed will grow in soil that had sufficient nitrogen, but will appear much less vigorous. It should be noted that some weeds like purple nettle and Shepherd's purse will grow on most soil types and so are not reliable indicators. Cornflowers and Hydrangeas are excellent indicators for a soil's pH, the flowers will be pink in an acidic soil and blue in an alkaline soil.

An acidic soil is a soil with a pH below 7.0. Look for these weeds as an indicator of an acidic soil: eastern Bracken, Buggenum buttercup, Chamomile-German, Curly Dock, English Daisy, Ox-Eye Daisy, Dandelion, Hawkweeds, Knapweeds, Lady's-Thumb, Mayweed, Mosses, common Mullein, Nettles, Wild Pansy (*Viola* sp.), Pineapple Weed, Pinks, Plantain, Prostrate Knotweed, Wild Radish,, Rough Cinquefoil, Sheep Sorrel, Silvery Cinquefoil, Sow Thistle, Corn Spurry, and Wild Strawberries). Plants that grow well in an acidic soil are azaleas, blueberries, endive, hydrangeas, rhododendrons, rhubarb, potatoes, shallots, sweet potatoes, and watermelons. Adding lime or using wood-stove or fireplace ashes can raise the soil's pH to the desirable pH range. Alkaline soil has a pH higher than 7.0. Weeds that indicate an alkaline soil are: Bellflower, Bladder Campion,

Wild Carrot, Field Peppergrass, Goosefoot, Gromwell, Black Henbane, White Mustard, Pennycress, Salad Burnett, Scarlet Pimpernel, Stinkweed, Nodding Thistle, and True Chamomile. Asparagus, broccoli, beets, lettuce, muskmelons, onions, and spinach do well in alkaline soil. Sulfur can be added to an overly alkaline soil to lower its pH.

A healthy, fertile soil will have a pH of 6.2 to 7.0. Weeds indicating a fertile soil are: Burdock, Butter Print, Chickweed, Chicory, Dandelion, Fat Hen, Groundsel, Lamb's-Quarters, Pigweeds, Pokeweed, Purslane, Queen Anne's Lace, and Velvetleaf. Broccoli, corn, lettuce, melons, peppers, squash, and tomatoes are all heavy feeders and will thrive in a fertile soil.

A poor or depleted soil will have weeds such as: Broom Sedge, Dog Fennel, Wild Radish, Sheep Sorrel, Wild Parsnip, Biennial Wormwood and Yellow Toadflax. Beans, beets, carrots, legumes, parsnips, peas, radishes, sage, and thyme will tolerate poor soil conditions and perform well in depleted soil.

A heavy or clay soil will have Broadleaf Dock, Wild Carrot, Chicory, Creeping Buttercup, English Daisy, Dandelion, Mayweed, Milkweed, Plantain, Canada Thistle and Wild Garlic.

Weeds that indicate a wet, poorly draining soil are: Hedge Bindweed, Bull Sedge, Canada Goldenrod, Cattail, Coltsfoot, Creeping Buttercup, Curly Dock, Ox-Eye Daisy, Docks, Foxtail, Goldenrods, Groundnut, Poison Hemlock, Horsetail, Jewelweed, Joe Pye weed, Lady's Thumb, Marsh Mallow, May Apple, Meadow Pink, Meadow Sweet, Mosses, Stinging Nettles, Pennsylvania Smartweed, Ragwort, Tansy, Sheep Sorrel, Silvery Cinquefoil, Sweet Flag, Tall Buttercup, Thyme-leaved Speedwell and Black Willow. If you see Dock, Horsetail, Foxtails, Willows, Ox-Eye Daisy, Goldenrod, Poison Hemlock, Rushes, Sedges and Joe Pye you can expect soil in that area to experience soggy or swampy conditions at some time of the year. Wet spots are obvious during the rainy season but could appear fairly dry at other times. These weeds are excellent indicators that the area will be soggy at some time during the year.

Weeds that grow in sandy soils are: Arrow-leaved Wild Lettuce, Field Bindweed, White Cockle, Cornflower, Dog Fennel, Goldenrods, Maltese Thistle, Sandbur, Small Nettle, and Yellow Toadflax.

Weeds that indicate a hardpan soil are: Field Mustard, Horse Nettle, Morning Glory, Pennycress, Pineapple Weed, and Quack Grass. Bok choy, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and mustards grow well in this type of soil.

Previously cultivated soil will have these weeds predominately: Carpet Weed, Chickweed, Dandelion, Lamb's Quarter, Plantain, Purslane, Ragweed, and Rough Pigweed.

Individual weeds that indicate a soil's nutrient values are useful in determining if the soil is unbalanced. Annual Bluegrass indicates very low calcium, low humus, low bacterial count, and high magnesium levels. Burdock grows in soils very high in iron and sulfate, and very low levels of calcium and manganese. Buckhorn Plantain indicate very low levels of calcium, low humus levels, and very high in chlorine, magnesium, potassium, and sodium. Common Chickweed and Mouse Ear Chickweed indicate very low calcium and phosphorus levels, and very high potassium and sodium levels. Crabgrass indicates very low levels of calcium and phosphorus, low pH, low humus, very high chlorine levels, and high levels of magnesium and potassium.

Dallisgrass indicates low calcium, very high magnesium, and high potassium levels. Dandelions indicate very low levels of calcium, and very high levels of chlorine and potassium. Hop Clover and Oxalis indicate very low levels of calcium, and high levels of magnesium. Prostrate Spurge indicates low calcium levels and very high levels of chlorine, magnesium, potassium, and sodium. Purslane and Mustard indicate an abundance of phosphorus. Red Clover indicates an excess of potassium. Redroot Pigweed indicates an

abundance of nitrogen. White Clover indicates very high levels in chlorine, magnesium, and sodium. Wild Garlic indicates very low calcium and bacterial count, and very high levels of chlorine, magnesium, potassium, and sodium. Yarrow indicates low potassium.

Soil can be depleted of a needed mineral or have an excessive amount of a mineral and need to become more balanced, eliminating many growing problems. Calcium doesn't move freely within the plant, so the first symptoms of low calcium will appear in new growth. Chlorosis begins first at the leaf edges and then moves inward. Terminal buds become distorted. Young leaves will first turn yellow, then brown. Low calcium levels cause tomatoes to develop blossom-end rot and lettuce tip-burn. Low calcium is found in acidic soils, sandy soils and soils that contain excessive levels of magnesium or potassium. Temporary problems may be due to drought or excessive moisture. Eggshells or oyster shells will strengthen plants in low calcium areas.

Low copper levels will cause young leaves to become chlorotic in a strange way. The leaf center yellows while the veins and leaf margins remain green for a while. Shoot tips die, terminal leaves become brown or leaves may fail to develop. This is common in muck or peat soils, soils with too much lime, nitrogen, phosphate, phosphorus, or zinc.

Low-iron chlorosis begins at the top of the plants and works its way down. Shoots may die back and the fruit become discolored.

Alkaline soils or soils with excess aluminum or phosphorus can cause low iron levels. Iron is important in photosynthesis and is a catalyst in plant respiration and iron utilization.

Magnesium moves freely within plants, so a magnesium deficiency will start in the lower leaves, discoloring the veins. First they turn yellow, then orange, and finally brown. Leaves will feel brittle, thin, and sometimes cup upward. Magnesium deficiency is found in wet, acidic, or sandy soils, also in soils with high concentrations of calcium, fertilizers, and potash. Magnesium is vital for photosynthesis, facilitates the use of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sulfur. It cleanses the plant of toxins that happen as a by-product of its own metabolism, and it's needed in the formation of proteins. Manganese deficiency may be hard to diagnose because it's similar to iron deficiency. Chlorosis is most severe at the

top of the plant, with yellowing of the leaves first appearing near the leaf margins and developing into a V-shaped pattern. Leaves will then develop tan or gray spots. These spots are the major difference between manganese and iron deficiency. Manganese deficiency most often occurs in alkaline soils high in humus or soils with a pH of 6 or more. Manganese is a catalyst in the process of plant nutrition and encourages the growth and maturation of plants.

Nitrogen deficiency will cause plants to turn pale green, then yellow. It begins at the tip of leaves at the bottom of plants, especially older leaves, and works its way in the direction of the main stem. Yellowing gradually spreads up the plant to the top. Found in very sandy soils or soils low in organic material, also excessively wet or leached soil. Nitrogen regulates vital chemical reactions, needed in stem and leaf growth and induces rapid green growth.

In the early stages of phosphorus deficiency the plants look almost too healthy. Growth is normal but undersized. Plants become dark green frequently changing to purple, especially the undersides of leaves. Sometimes stems also take on this color. Leaves then yellow in the final stages. The plant has poor flowering and fruiting habits. Most common in cold, wet or very acidic (below pH5) soils and very alkaline soils (above pH 7.3). Phosphorus is needed for root formation, flowering, fruiting and ripening.

In potassium deficiency, the older leaves become mottled or spotted, edges become dry and scorched. Dead spots begin to appear, the stems are weak, root systems poor, and fruit ripens unevenly. Potassium deficiency causes a reduction in disease resistance and makes the plant less storable. It is more common in sandy or acidic soils, also where there are excess calcium or magnesium levels in the soil. Potassium is important for the formation of flowers, fruit, leaves and growing tip. Potassium helps with photosynthesis at low light level and in internal water regulation. Potassium improves flavor, fruit, vegetable and flower color. It also provides protection from insect damage, disease, and frost.

Sulfur deficiency closely resembles nitrogen deficiency. The plants turn pale green, the effects show up first in young growth. Leaves turn yellow but they don't

dry out, and stems are weak. Legumes are most affected. Sandy or very wet soils, and soils containing excessive amounts of nitrogen are the most common soil types with a potassium deficiency. Together with nitrogen it makes protoplasm for plant cells.

A zinc deficiency can be similar to a nitrogen deficiency with rolled leaf margins. Chlorosis shows up first in young leaves, which are also reduced in size. Leaves are closely spaced, forming rosettes, and may be deformed. There is poor nitrogen formation in legumes. Soils that are sandy and acidic or alkaline and rich in humus, or excessively high in phosphates, nitrogen, calcium, or aluminum will most often be zinc deficient. Zinc aids in the formation of growth hormones, protein synthesis, seed and grain production, and plant maturation.

The observant farmer and gardener will notice subtle changes in the weed populations as the soil changes. As the soil improves, chickweed, chicory, common groundsel, common horehound, and lambs quarter become the dominant weeds. However, if the daisy, wild carrot, mugwort, common mullein, wild parsnip, wild radish, and biennial wormwood become dominant, that's a sign of the soil's low fertility and can be corrected. The addition of well-balanced compost, organic manures, and other fertilizers together with certain tillage and drainage practices may be required to return the soil back to a healthy, well balanced, and productive soil.

There will always be a battle between man and weed, but knowing that weeds can be used not only as a soil indicator, but also the flower of many weeds provide essential nectar and pollen, the foods needed by beneficial insects to complete their life cycle. Most insect pests would actually prefer to dine on weeds rather than your deliberately planted crops, if given the choice, so weeds can be good companion plants, and last, but not least, they're edible. I can never defeat the weed, so I must live with the weed. Now I have an excuse for not spending hours pulling out the weeds in the garden. Now I can spend time wandering in my blended garden enjoying both plants and weeds. They are rebels, just like me.

LASAGNA GARDENING

Building A Soil Recipe For Success

Have you ever wanted to plant something quickly and find out that it takes an hour just to get your trowel through the rocks, roots and clay? Have you had to get other tools just to make a hole large enough to get it planted? If so, the solution is lasagna gardening! Lasagna gardening is an organic layering method that creates wonderful black, crumbly, fertile soil. No tilling, no digging, and very little weeding! It's easy, economical by using many organic items you have in your own backyard, and it is fun!

As Master Gardeners, we all know the importance of a good foundation for our plants, which is the soil. Lasagna gardening makes planting and maintaining so easy and the plants grow incredibly well and healthy.

A lasagna garden can be installed anywhere, even on compacted soil. Your first garden should stay small, such as a 4x8-foot area until you have experience as to how much of the materials you will be using. You can build your lasagna garden in stages, layering as you get the ingredients or all at once. If you have everything available, a small garden would take about 45 minutes to create.

To get started, gather your "ingredients" such as peat moss, aged cow or horse manure, shredded leaves, compost, dried grass clippings, straw (watch for seeds), wood ashes (use sparingly) and some type of mulch. You can use the leaf mulch from the Botanical Garden and even cotton gin by-product as long as you use the aged from the bottom of the pile. If you cannot locate or want an easier way to get your ingredients, you can buy most of this at any local nursery or big-box store.

You will also need a lot of newspapers or cardboard. When I am in need of newspapers, I will "borrow" them from neighbors' recycling bins when at the street. Do not use the shiny ads or the cardboard that has the waxy film. You also need a bucket of water if using newspapers. If you are using cardboard, be sure to wet the cardboard really good with a hose before you begin to layer.

Decide where you are going to have your garden. Edge around where you are planning on installing your garden. If you have Bermuda grass, edge by cutting the grass to stop the vines from growing in your new garden.



The results of lasagna gardening as a healthy base for these hydrangeas.

Lasagna Garden Ingredients:

- peat moss
- aged cow or horse manure
- shredded leaves
- compost
- dried grass clippings
- straw (watch for seeds)
- wood ashes (use sparingly)
- some type of mulch
- newspapers and/or cardboard

Mow weeds or grass as low as you can to the ground. Place a stack of newspapers in your bucket of water and saturate. Begin laying the newspapers (at least eight pages thick) over your area until it is completely covered. Spread damp peat moss (3 to 4 inches), then a minimum of 3 to 5 inches of as many of the ingredients that you have available. The garden should be at least 12 to 15 inches high when complete as this will continue to break down and compost to make this wonderful soil. Water every few layers, and then water thoroughly on your final layer before the mulch. The bed should be damp enough before you mulch to be the consistency of a wrung out sponge. Be sure to mulch as your final layer as this will hold in the moisture, keep the roots cool and protect from heavy rains and the sun.

You can begin planting immediately by just separating the "soil" with your hands. This is also a great environment to grow seeds. If you would rather wait until it breaks down, it will take 3 or more weeks depending on the time of the year you build the lasagna garden. You can plant anything in a lasagna garden. I have planted bulbs, seeds, berries, vegetables, perennial and annual flowers, bushes, and herbs. Everything grows beautifully!

To maintain your lasagna garden, add a layer of compost, chopped leaves, or other ingredients to the top layer once every year or two.

Bon appetite and happy gardening!!



Newspapers and cardboard are your first layer. Do not use paper with shiny ads or cardboard with waxy film



After the paper, layer with damp peat moss, then follow with ingredients such as this leaf mulch, shown.



Top it all off with mulch/pine straw to hold in the moisture, keep roots cool, and protect from heavy rains and the sun.

