



The Virtual Gardener—The New Look of Cooperative Extension

The Cooperative Extension System has been around for a long time. Its history really began in 1862 when Congress created the land-grant university system to promote the teaching of agriculture, science, and engineering—practical subjects for a developing nation. The next step was taken in 1914 when the Smith-Lever Act created the Cooperative Extension System to bring the fruits of research conducted by the land-grant universities to the people through education. The system is “cooperative” because it represents a partnership between federal, state, and local governments. Today there are 2,900 Cooperative Extension offices around the country serving approximately 3,000 counties. Our own University of Arizona is a land-grant institution and operates the Cooperative Extension System for Arizona.

In 2008 Congress revamped the Cooperative Extension System, placing it under the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), a newly created agency of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. This in turn laid the groundwork for the creation of a coordinated, internet-based system to

more efficiently promulgate information to consumers. This system, called “eXtension,” is up and running and ready for you to use. The [link](#) to eXtension will take you to a screen showing the nearest participating college or university—in our case, the University of Arizona.

The system, better described as a portal, connects users with links to a set of resource areas supported by a virtual network of subject matter experts called a Community of Practice (CoP). A CoP can be created by a group of experts who believe a topic is of interest to users or proposed by users who would like to see information about a topic. The list of CoP is dynamic and presumably old topics can disappear if interest in them wanes. Currently the eXtension website for the University of Arizona lists 46 resource areas grouped into eight categories. Each resource area, or CoP, may include articles, news items, lists of events, and collections of frequently asked questions (FAQ).

Because the eXtension system is so new, some of the topics are a little bare of content at the moment, but this will

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change over time. The resource area for Master Gardeners, for example, provides some interesting general information about the program—in 2009 there were 94,865 Master Gardener volunteers in the United States who contributed 5,197,573 hours of volunteer time—and a nice long video about Master Gardeners in Louisiana but nothing specific about Arizona Master Gardeners. The event list does not even include our High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference to be held here in Sierra Vista in February. We'll have to fix that!

Because the eXtension system is national, it must include information for all regions of the country. When checking for information about [gardens, lawns and landscapes](#), be sure the information you find is applicable our area, specifically the High

Deserts of Arizona. Look for links to “Regional Gardening Resources” and look in the Western region for Arizona-specific information. The only Arizona-specific horticultural guidance I could find at the time this was written was under the topic “Fruit Growing by Region,” which included links to two University of Arizona Cooperative Extension bulletins, [Backyard Fruit Production at Elevations 3500 to 6000 Feet](#) and [Deciduous Fruit & Nuts for the Low Desert](#).

Looking for topic-specific information in the Resource Area is only one way to find information. If you don't find what you are looking for there, try the “[Answers from Experts](#)” section, which includes a list of frequently asked questions that have been answered by experts. Rob Call, our own Extension Educator, is often asked to contribute answers

to questions. Although the full list of questions and answers is a little intimidating (there are over 13,000), you can narrow the list to smaller subsets by selecting a topic from the drop-down list above the questions. If you still can't find what you are looking for, try the search box in menu bar at the top of the page.

Because the eXtension portal is user-driven, you can help expand it by submitting your questions to the system. Scattered throughout the pages are links that invite you to “Ask an Expert.” Clicking on one of these will lead you to a page that allows you to type your question into a text box and send it off. Questions relevant to any of the “Resource Areas” are fair game.

Until next time, happy surfing!

Gary A. Gruenhagen, Master Gardener
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High on the Desert

High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference Scholarship Application

The Cochise County Master Gardeners Association (CCMGA) is awarding up to three full scholarships to the 2012 High Desert Gardening & Landscaping Conference to be held at the Windemere Hotel & Conference Center, Sierra Vista, AZ, February 16 & 17, 2012. Applicants are invited to submit an essay on one of the following topics:

- Gardening for food production**
- Landscaping with native plants**
- Environmental stewardship**

Essays must meet the following criteria:

1. 750 to 1,000 words in length.
2. A hard copy double spaced and typed on plain bond paper and/or a soft copy in MS Word format (doc or docx).
3. Represent original scholarship and be suitable for publication. All references and authorities cited must be properly attributed.
4. Entries must be accompanied by an official cover sheet available from the Cooperative Extension Office at the UA South campus or from the Master Gardener web site: www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/
5. Entries must be received at the Cooperative Extension Office, 1140 N. Colombo, Sierra Vista, AZ 85635 not later than close of business on January 13, 2012.

Entries will be judged by the Cochise County Horticulture Extension Agent and a committee of Master Gardeners appointed by the President of CCMGA. The awardees will be notified not later than January 27, 2012 and their names published in the February 2012 Master Gardener Newsletter.

My Favorite Vegetables

The chill of winter is here and that means the 2012 seed catalogs are starting to arrive in the mail. I've already received two and there are many more to come. These catalogs make many a cold evening so enjoyable, reading, and dreaming about spectacular vegetable varieties that, at least according to the catalog writers, just can't miss. Gosh, here's a pea variety that produces twice as long as others and it's heat resistant to boot. In another catalog, here's a new hybrid tomato that yields large quantities of those good old beefsteak-type tomatoes that do a BLT justice. And, wow, a winter squash that laughs off powdery mildew. Gotta have that one! Heck, you're a gardener, you know the drill. The arrival of seed catalogs means it's time to get next year's garden underway. Below are some descriptions of vegetables I enjoy growing.

In winter, garlic and onions are musts. Garlic has always been a success for me. It's easy to grow and few critters or diseases bother it. My preference is to grow hard-neck varieties since the cloves are larger and easier to peel than those of softnecks. German Extra Hardy has been my mainstay, but this year I'm also planting a new variety from bulbs that I purchased from a grower at a local Farmers Market. He's been growing the same strain (Italian Red, I think) and saving seed cloves from it for about ten years, so it's well adapted to our climate. The bulbs are enormous. In contrast to garlic, my luck with onions is nothing to brag about. Most of my onions have been small. I've always grown onions from sets, which I've recently learned don't always do well when

winter days vary between warm and cool. So this year, I'm using onions starts (small plants) that I've mail ordered from onion specialist Dixondale Farms. Should you choose to raise onions, remember to select short day varieties as the daylight hours in our part of the country aren't long enough to support the growth of long day onions when planted in the fall.

Other cool weather crops that are mainstays for me are beets (any variety), lettuce (red leaf types are my favorite), and carrots. My carrot preference is for 'Nantes' varieties. 'Nantes' are short, blocky carrots that are, in my opinion, sweeter than others. Their shorter length also means less likelihood of bent, forked, and otherwise deformed carrots in our hard soils. For fun, try and find red or purple varieties. While the red color is lost when cooked, they look real snazzy on a crudité platter.



Two summer crops that I highly recommend are sweet potatoes and peanuts. It just so neat to dig a mess of peanuts. Our grandkids were fascinated with them. Sweet potatoes, like garlic, have few pests and are, in my experience, quite reliable. My preference is for 'Beauregard' and 'Georgia Jet', both of which yield more heavily than many others. Both sweet potatoes and (especially) peanuts need a long, warm growing season, so get them in the ground by early June at the latest. Still another unusual and easy to grow vegetable is fennel. Fennel, which resembles celery a bit, has a

mild licorice-like taste and it's great in stews and soups, as well as thinly sliced on a salad.

My favorite muskmelon/ cantaloupe is 'Ananas', a whitish-pink fleshed variety from Pinetree Garden Seeds. For watermelon, I like a Baker Creek Heirloom Seed variety known as 'Ali Baba'. 'Ali Baba', which has an Iraqi heritage—perfect for our desert climate—produces large, red fleshed watermelons with a light green, mottled exterior and great taste.

When it comes to bell peppers, a Burpee variety called 'Great Stuff' gets my vote hands down. It's a hybrid that produces very large, blocky bells, that measure from six to eight inches long. Let 'em turn red for a real sweet treat. I like to grow chiles, too; jalapeños and serranos for salsas and guajillos for drying. Guajillos make a great enchilada sauce. They're nice and kind of smoky tasting, with just the right touch of heat. Last year, to jazz things up a bit, I planted the 'Bhut Jolokia' chile (aka 'Ghost Pepper'), which is reputedly twice as hot as a Habanero, but, alas, my yield was zilch. Only one of a half dozen or so plants even survived to be planted outdoors. Ouch!

Finally, of course, this coming summer I'll continue my search for the perfect tomato.

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Robert E. Call

Robert E. Call
Area Horticulture Educator/Agent
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The Sierra Vista Community Garden

Why have community gardens? According to the American Community garden Association:

Benefits of Community Gardens:

- Improves the quality of life for people in the garden
- provides a catalyst for neighborhood and community development
- stimulates social interaction
- encourages self-reliance
- beautifies neighborhoods
- produces nutritious food
- reduces family food budgets
- conserves resources
- creates opportunity for recreation, exercise, therapy, and education
- reduces crime
- preserves green space
- creates income opportunities and economic development
- reduces city heat from streets and parking lots
- provides opportunities for intergenerational and cross-cultural connections

I will take a few of these points to expand on our reasons for starting a community garden in Sierra Vista.

1. Reduces Family Food Budgets.

Type in "food shortages" on Yahoo and you will get over 43 million hits. Many of these are hucksters trying to sell you something but many are good articles on food shortages around the world and predictions of increased costs. Anyone who shops for food regularly has seen the increase of prices at the local stores. On the USDA.gov website food cost charts are published. For an average US

family of 4 the estimated monthly cost for food based on the FDA charts have increased 3.5% to 4.3%, with the highest increase being in the Thrift Plan. This is for January to September of 2011 and that is only 9 months. If the trend continues that would predict an annual inflation rate of 4.7% to 5.7% for food

http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDA_FoodCost-Home.htm Take home pay has not kept up with this increase.

2. Produces Nutritious Food

The disconnect between food production and consumption has been long lamented by nutritionists, according to an article from Fall 2002 *Development and Evaluation of a Garden-Enhanced Nutrition Education Curriculum for Elementary Schoolchildren*, Jennifer L. Morris, PhD; Marilyn Briggs, MS, RD; and Sheri Zidenberg-Cherr, PhD. "Gardens also provide students with hands-on experience throughout growing, harvesting, and preparing common and uncommon foods. This allows students to gain complete ownership in the process of selecting the foods they eat. Children are more likely to taste vegetables that they

grow themselves versus vegetables presented to them (Morris et al., 2001)."

3. Provides a catalyst for neighborhood and community development. The West End of Sierra Vista has been working on revitalization. We will be partnering with Pantano Christian Church to provide a community playground, education Ramada and herb garden. We hope to see members of the community use this resource for **recreation, exercise, therapy, and education.**

4. Improves the quality of life for people in the garden.

Children, adults, singles and families can all benefit from time in the fresh air and open space of a garden. We plan to use the organic method of gardening to ensure a garden that any child or adult can utilize without worrying about exposure to chemicals. Increase in types and freshness of vegetables will improve nutrition. Exercise from working the garden will improve strength, flexibility and stamina.

We, the members of the Sierra Vista Community Gardens, Inc. are working toward the goal of a spring of 2012 planting season. If you have any questions or would like to join us, we have meetings the 3rd Monday of each month at 5:30 PM at the Pantano Christian Church meeting room. or you can call me at (520) 236-8021 or email me at:

hillebrand_1@msn.com.

Rebecca Hillebrand
Master Gardener



The Agent's Observations

Q Our dog was sprayed by a skunk. Is there any thing that we can bathe him in to get rid of the horrid smell? We have tried tomato juice and it did not work that well and was quite expensive.



A The following recipe has been successful in decreasing the smell of skunk sprayed pets.

The Skunk De-fuser

One quart of hydrogen peroxide

1/2 cup baking soda

A squirt of liquid hand soap

Mixture will foam up. Spread over pet and leave on for a few minutes.

Wash pet with soap and water after treatment.

Repeat if necessary.

(Hydrogen peroxide will help break down sulfur compounds in the skunk spray that cause the smell.)

Source: Rob Call's Desk Top Rolodex. A Yavapai County Extension recommendation.

Q With holidays coming I would like to have some ideas for presents gifts for the gardeners in our family. Do you have any recommendations?

A There are many items gardeners can use to help them in their pursuit of growing plants. A good pair of gloves or gardening shoes is always appreciated. A wide-brimmed hat to shade the face, neck, and ears is always needed in the Arizona sun, as well as good sunglasses and sun screen. How about a good quality dust/pollen mask for those who fight allergies? A kneeling pad or a nursery cart or two-wheeled wheel barrow are a good investment. Bypass scissor action pruning shears make short work of harvesting flowers and pruning plants. Felco brand, from Switzerland, is the industry standard and will last a life time. Consider a belt holster to carry the shears. Pruning loppers, with an adjustable blade and hook and replaceable handles, are also an investment for a lifetime. Corona is a very good brand along with Fiskars, the scissor company. They both also offer good cross-cut, sliding or folding fan saws that fit nicely in a back pocket. A Hula-Ho or scuffle hoe severs weed tops from their roots with minimal soil disturbance and work better than a traditional hoe. Other hand tools like shovels, rakes and cultivators

are always needed in the garden and landscape. Fiberglass handles are lighter weight than wooden ones and can be stronger. A garden tool caddy that drapes over a 5-gallon plastic bucket will help organize a gardener's hand tools and supplies. Velcro brand offers a whole line of gardening ties for plants as well as hardscapes. Wall-O'Water Season Extenders are effective when placed over tender crops to avoid late spring freezes and help get a jump on the growing season. Shade cloth or hail netting help with environmental stresses, but also protect new-seeded or plants from birds and rodents. A good rain gauge, indoor/outdoor thermometer, or a digital weather station are nice to have. Weather stations can be as expensive as you would like. There are many to choose from. Grow lights help with the growth of indoor plants. There are many models to choose from. Growing an amaryllis bulb or forcing bulbs indoors is a good way to bring spring to a dreary winter. There are many live orchids to choose from that are low maintenance and produce beautiful flowers. Grow boxes with integrated water and fertilizing systems can be fun to use and will produce edible crops. How about automating an irrigation system with a digital clock? Several models are available, with hose bib types the easiest to install. Appropriate garden-

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Cochise County Master Gardeners Association in conjunction with
The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension presents . . .



the 19th annual
**High Desert Gardening &
Landscaping Conference**

High on the Desert



February 16 & 17, 2012
Windemere Hotel & Conference Center
Sierra Vista, AZ

An educational experience for everyone with an interest in gardening. † For information contact
U of A Cooperative Extension † 1140 N. Colombo † Sierra Vista, AZ (520) 458-8278, Ext. 2141
www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/ † Registration and fee required for conference †

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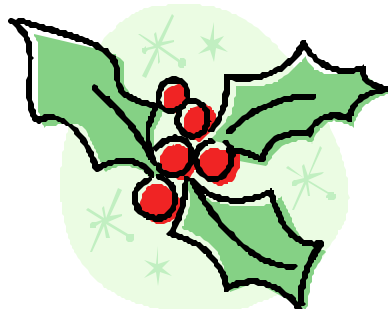
ing books for the high desert are always appreciated. If gardeners do not have *Sunset's Western Garden Book* it will probably be used more than a Bible! Other recommended books can be found at

<http://cals.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/booklist.htm>

For more expensive gifts how about a small rototiller? Electric as well as gasoline operated models are available. Has the gardener in your life always wanted a greenhouse to grow winter vegetables, start plants or maintain a plant collection? They come in all sizes and can cost as little as a couple of hundred to thousands of dollars. Look for glass or poly-carbonate panels for long life. Fiberglass or plastic panels tend to yellow within a

few years in our intense sunlight. Rainwater harvesting barrels, tanks or bladders will decrease watering costs while delivering some of the best water available for plants. Rain gutters are needed to make these items the most efficient. Surely there are other items that will make good gifts but this list suggests items which are quite practical and useful. Happy Holidays!

Robert E. Call
Area Horticulture Educator/Agent



Cuttings 'N' Clippings

* The December CCMGA meeting is a holiday party for Master Gardeners and their families. The January 5, 2012 meeting will be held at 5:00 p.m. in the Public Meeting Room at UAS and will feature Kim McReynolds speaking on *The Grasslands of Cochise County*. For more information go to Events at:

www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg

* **High on the Desert**
February 16 & 17, 2012