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issue

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YELLOWSTONE MASTER GARDENER NEWSLETTER



Volume 6 Issue 2

April May June 2017

NICK NICOLL ~ Master Gardeners ~ JOAN MILLER

Nick Nicoll was born in Scotland and lived there with his family until arriving in Boston at one year, 10 days old. He lost his two sisters at an early age and his father passed away at an early 47. His mother and brother are still living in the US. Nick's



wife, Vicki,

works in an accounting office and they have three children ages 29, 25 and 21. Two are working in art and the youngest is studying microbiology.

Nick returned to Scotland for a year when in the fourth grade and remembers his grandfather's Victory Garden, the smell of the soil, the garden shed with all the tools and watching plants grow. He also travelled all over the world while in the Air Force, opening new ideas and learning from different countries. He likes to take classes and happened to see one advertised for Master Gardeners about six years ago. The information he gained about soil, amendments, compost and trees was just what he was looking for.

He very much likes science and learning.

Nick is also a people person and enjoys meeting and working with other gardeners at field trips; classes; and the gardens at the Zoo, Metra, St. Andrew's; and judging at the Billings Clinic Science Fair. He is a "tree guy" and found the classes from Master Gardeners on pruning, growing, planting and seeing the "old survivors" in Billings very useful.

Insects and disease are the most challenging aspects of gardening for Nick (you're not alone). To have everything

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Joan Miller was born and raised in Flint, MI along with her two brothers and family. Her



parents didn't have a garden but did have a nice yard. She taught school in Flint for two years before moving to the mountains in Jardine, MT to teach in Gardiner.

Joan planted

potatoes and carrots in Jardine to help with winter stores, except one year a huge grizzly bear ate every carrot in the garden! She had a very good friend across the road who gardened and had a greenhouse. Betty Wormsbecker played a huge role in teaching Joan about growing a garden at 6200' and first try at canning, which she still does every year. A master gardener program with Cheryl Moore Gough as the instructor was advertised in the Livingston paper; unfortunately the class was filled by the time Joan applied, so in 2011 she signed up for the program in Billings.

After teaching in Gardiner for 12 years and then Mammoth for 16 years, the Mammoth School was closed in 2008. Joan and her husband, Christopher, moved to Bridger, Montana. Christopher began building a fence for a garden with 11'x7" posts and large gates to accommodate heavy equipment. Remember they were used to gardening with buffalo, elk and bear. She had attended a class on square foot gardening at the Billings Public Library and chose that format for the new garden. Christopher made her 11 - 4'x4' boxes and 3 - 2.5'x8' boxes. She also has a 12'x32' open area in the enclosure as well. Outside the fence is where the rhubarb, compost and more flowers reside. She was told by some "old-time" gardeners that only 85-90 year old ladies have flowers in a vegetable garden. Her brother-in-law practices "no till" gardening

(Continued on page 2)

NICK NICOLL ~ INTERVIEW CONTINUED

growing well till one morning you see white (powdery mildew) on the zucchini is disheartening. Nick has kept a log when gardening. He notes what was planted, when, where, problems and harvest. Is the plant worthy of trying again or not?

His favorite garden vegetable is Sweet Baby Girl tomatoes - the sweetest cherry tomatoes. He has also been growing Globe Thistles so that he can use their likeness as part of the logo for his business. The garden area and compost spot have had to move a couple of times in the past years to make room for sheds to hold wood that will be made into furniture and other items, his first creative passion. Nick is an artist and has recently started painting. I just had to ask the question from PBS's "A Craftsman's Legacy", "Do you consider yourself an artist or a craftsman?" He is artist first and as a craftsman is able to bring his inspirations to life.

We are very lucky to have such a knowledgeable person as Nick with our Master Gardeners group.

Submitted by Sheri Kisch

JOAN MILLER ~ INTERVIEW CONTINUED

and she is trying to implement that method even though the old guys rototill their gardens every year and have beautiful produce.

It would be easier to list what Joan doesn't plant, but her favorites are beans, carrots, potatoes, eggplant, cabbage, onions, cukes, tomatoes, acorn squash and raspberries. She loves sweet peas, sunflowers of all kinds, coneflowers, black-eyed susans, lungwort, Lady's mantle, and geraniums (of which she brings about 20 pots into the garage for the winter). She also has roses as a living memory of her grandfather from Poland.

Joan has spent her volunteer hours at the Special K Ranch, Geranium Fest and Farmers Market. She is currently the president of the Community Bloom, Etc. garden club which cares for the flower beds and tubs at the Bridger Library. She also belongs to the Big Sky Iris Club.

To new members, she says "be brave" and try new things. You should also be prepared to put in the work (Joan calls it play for a better frame of mind) if you expect to garden. Whatever you do, do it with love.... planting, weeding, keeping things tidy. Your garden can become a place for miracles.

Sounds like a perfect place for an outing. Thank you for sharing, Joan.

Submitted by Sheri Kisch

BILLINGS LIBRARY GARDENING SERIES

Since the opening of the new library, Master Gardeners Tracy Livingston & Elaine Allard have coordinated almost 20 presentations at the library with Master Gardeners and community members volunteering to share their expertise. Recent presentations were Gainan's on Micro Greens in January; Tom Kress on Tools and Tips for Seed Starting in February; and Arborist Mike Garvey on "Unique and Seldom Seen Trees Planted in Billings" in March. Coming up on April 18th (5:00-6:00) is lawn expert James Roberts from TruGreen. James will talk about lawn care including: nutrient needs, pest management, and cultural practices and how to address common problems such as weeds, insects, diseases and corrective and preventative actions.

Information on upcoming gardening presentations can be found on the Library calendar <http://billingslibrary.org/calendar.aspx> and in the Library Newsletter <http://billingslibrary.org/DocumentCenter/View/317> and listed in Amy's calendar as upcoming events.

Submitted by Elaine Allard

HERE'S THE DIRT

Here are a few fun tips in preparation for the upcoming growing season.

- A combination of water, white vinegar and rubbing alcohol can be used to remove the salt deposits on clay pots. Simply mix equal parts of each ingredient in a spray bottle. Spray pots liberally and scrub pots with a stiff plastic brush. Rinse well. Let completely dry before potting any plants in your pots.
- Save the water you use to steam and boil your vegetables. Instead let it cool and use it to water your plants especially your outdoor potted plants and watch how well they do after a few waterings.
- If you are not already doing this next tip for your big outdoor pots you should be. Find a plastic liner pot that is not as deep as your outdoor pot but is wide enough across the pot to just fit in it. After you plant your liner pot with plants it can easily be slipped into the larger outdoor pot. Once your plants start to grow and fill in you will never notice the liner pot. This tip is great for your budget as well as fall clean up. The liner can be pulled and filled with fresh soil in the spring and the outdoor pot can easily be moved indoors to avoid winter damage.

Submitted by Donna Canino

PREP FOR GARDEN VOLUNTEER GIGS

When I first volunteered to earn my hours for Level 1, I was clueless. I still am in many ways, but I was so green then, and I am not referring to my thumb. I bounded out of my car towards St. Andrew's Community Garden and began digging an irrigation ditch, as I was instructed to do. I so much agree with that initiation. What is gardening, if not hard work? And I made it even harder by not being prepared. So before you gleefully drive to a henceforth obscure site, at least for you, get your items together so you can return again and again.

Start with a 5-gallon plastic bucket. I know some of you may have decorated baskets for your items with matching garden gloves, but cut the cutesy now. You need something sturdy which has a handle, and, if damaged, does not dull your spirits. First and foremost, take care of yourself by packing a large, full water bottle, strong sunblock, a wide brimmed hat with a chin strap so you do not have to chase your hat onto a major thoroughfare when it blows off, sunglasses, and leather gloves. Leather is hotter than canvas, but it lasts more than two hours before getting holes. Wear light colored clothing and bring a snack, preferably not chocolate which melts all over your seed packets on a warm day. Consider used clothing instead of pristine, expensive togs. A chance of sweat mixing with "soil", designing large, permanent Jackson Pollock-worthy stains, runs high. Do not forget insect repellent, if you are prone to attracting our friends, and wear long sleeves and pants if you are even mildly allergic to sumacs or other plants. The shoes: a sturdy, closed toed pair which can and will get muddy. A plastic bag for your gardening shoes is only for the connoisseur. I even wear socks to avoid insects and blisters.

I have already made so many mistakes for everybody! Yet I am not done with advice, if you are still here with me.

Bring your own tools, unless you don't mind raw, oozing blisters (from using dull tools, the ones early birds skipped over) as bragging rights. Label your tools, too, or they walk off, not necessarily due to the neighborhood klepto, but they just work their way back into the shed of wherever you are. If you really want to impress the crew, although this step is treacherous, since people might assume that you know more than you do and pummel you with all sorts of esoteric questions, get a tool belt. I swear the sexiest garment I saw during the summer when I earned my first dozen volunteer hours was a tool belt. She got more done in a shorter length of time than me because I spent half the day running back and forth for various tools. You might be entering a new zone, so get the gear. In order of importance: a trowel, pruning shears, a weeder, a watering can, a shovel, a rake, and loppers. A good, sharp knife has many uses. Might these items be on sale at local hardware stores during snow blower season?

Last but far from least, get your body in shape to bend, yank, and grunt by exercising before spring, but that's another article. Consider a first-aid kit in your car, if you became glassy eyed during the previous suggestion. Load an ICE (in case of emergency) phone number into your cellphone, so your fellow gardeners can contact someone if you have a heat stroke. Some of us might be little old grandmas, like me, but wimps we are not!

Submitted by Bess Lovec

GRAPES IN MONTANA ?

When I think of grapes and vineyards, I think of California, France or the Mediterranean. I don't really imagine grapes growing in our climate. Yet over 30 years ago we planted two grape vines near the entrance to my garden and they are still going strong all these years later!

Every year the stick-like canes sprout beautiful green grape leaves, then little grape buds, and in early to mid-August beautiful dark blue-black grapes. I know the grapes are ready to harvest when the wasps and robins begin hanging around the ripening grapes. I do little to tend the vines except trim them back some after the leaves have fallen in the fall and give them some of my home-made fertilizer in the spring.

The variety we planted is called "Valiant." It is a cross between native and concord grapes. It was originally bred in South Dakota but the same wild grapes in this cross also grow here in Montana. This variety may still be available from a landscape contractor. I'm not sure you would be able to find it in a retail store. I suspect having the wild genes in these plants helps them survive our harsh conditions, resist diseases,



and produce fruit in our short growing season. Perhaps there are other such crosses out there now if you cannot find "Valiant."

My grapes are not eating grapes. They are not sweet enough. I make grape juice from them every year. I think they would make a fine wine but I have not tried that. When they are ready, I harvest enough to make a few quarts of juice, then leave plenty of fruit for the birds and wasps (though for a few days I have to use the back entrance to my garden to avoid the wasps!).

I hope others will try grape vines in their gardens and will get the same pleasure and good juice from them that I have enjoyed all these many years!

Submitted by Ann Guthals

GRANNY'S GLUTEN-FREE OVEN BAKED BREAD

Ingredients:

3 ½ cups Namaste Foods Perfect Flour Blend (available at Costco)
 ½ cup cornstarch, arrowroot or tapioca starch
 1 tsp. salt
 1 ½ cups milk, any kind
 1 T. cider vinegar
 2 T. oil
 2 T. honey
 3 eggs (room temperature)
 1 T. yeast
 ¼ cup warm water



Directions:

Stir dry ingredients together in electric mixer bowl.

Mix yeast in ¼ cup warm water and set aside for 5 minutes. Warm milk and add oil, honey and cider vinegar. Beat eggs and add to milk mixture. Add yeast mixture to milk mixture and blend.

Add liquid ingredients to dry ingredients and blend on medium speed with electric mixer for 3 minutes. Pour into well-greased loaf pan. Cover loosely with sprayed waxed paper, parchment paper, or plastic wrap and towel and let rise for 30-35 minutes in warm place. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Cover loosely with foil tent to prevent over-browning and bake for 30 minutes. Remove foil and continue baking for another 35-40 minutes. Let cool completely.

Note: I warm my oven to 130 degrees, then turn off to provide a warm place for the rising. The rising takes about 30 to 35 minutes, I find it is important to let the bread cool completely before slicing or it will get squished! I use 2% or whole milk to give the bread body and flavor. There are other gluten-free flour blends—I have not tried them, but they may work in the recipe. For people who must be gluten-free, this bread is a great substitute for “real” bread. It is very tasty and people who are not gluten-free also like it. I have also added a cup and a fourth of shredded cheese to the recipe when I added the liquids to the dry ingredients.

From Namaste Foods and Ann Guthals



Sausage Soup

For all that cabbage from your bumper crop!

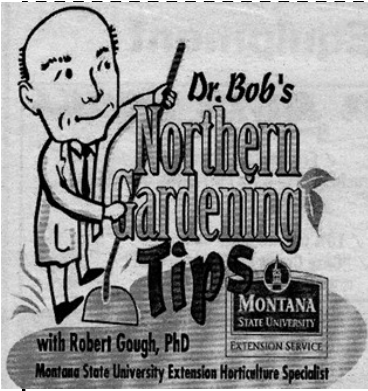
1 ring Kielbasa smoked sausage
 2 cans chicken broth
 2 cans small red beans
 16 oz. canned tomatoes
 1 large onion, sliced or chopped
 2 cups shredded cabbage



Slice sausage into medallions. For a unique flavor sauté them with the onions briefly before adding to the crock or stock pot. Combine remaining ingredients in a crock pot to slow cook all day or a stock pot and set to simmer for 2-3 hours. Serve with bread.

Submitted by Corinna Sinclair

The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is now.
By Darrell Putman



The late Dr. Bob is the father of Montana's Master Gardener program. When he taught the classes nobody ever fell asleep. He was a writer of a great many articles on gardening. The following is just one of several hundred in my files.

A question to Dr. Bob: "How can I increase germination of my garden seeds?" (March 2002)

"Gardeners all over the country are right now wondering how to get better germination in the vegetable and flower seeds. Of course, start with good seeds and in most cases you'll have good germination, but some seeds are notoriously tough with hard seed coats. Now, researchers in Georgia have found a common household substance that increases germination in watermelon seeds.

The seedless watermelon cultivars on the market are for the most part, triploids. That means that they form fruit that has no developed seeds. While they are no good for seed-spitting contests, the melons do make great eating. The triploid cultivars are expensive to produce and, unfortunately, the seeds have thick coats that interfere with germination. Researchers have found that soaking the seeds in 1 percent solution of hydrogen peroxide at room temperature and in the dark greatly improves their germination. After just a day or two in the solution, the seeds germinated readily in petri dishes and would no doubt do so in the garden soil.

The 1 percent solution does not damage the emerging radicle, but solutions two percent or higher do severe damage to the young seedling. The hydrogen peroxide is generally available in the drug store and is a three percent solution, so you must dilute it with water. You can do that by adding two parts water to one part hydrogen peroxide. So far, researchers have only tested the solution on watermelon seeds, but they suggest that it might also improve germination in a wide range of "hard-coated" seeds, such as those of cabbage and broccoli."

Submitted by Corry Mordeaux

PVC TOMATO CAGE



Using ½ inch PVC pipe, an easy to use and store tomato cage can be assembled. Build it to match your method of tomato growing. I plant in pots so the cages are made into two foot spacings to fit around my pots. These cages can be built as high and wide as needed. Using the two foot spacing I usually go to about five feet high to hold indeterminate tomatoes. These PVC cages set up quickly and easily and just as easy to tear down. They need little space for storage. I think they may last forever.

Submitted by Corry Mordeaux



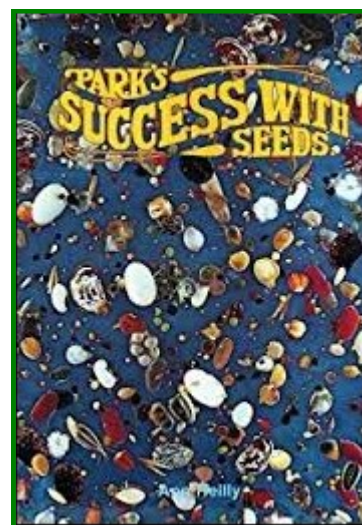
My Planting 'Bible'

It seems I've always known gardening – introduced by my mother, her mother, and my father's mother as well. These ladies worked hard always as farm wives, and especially diligently when they were in the garden. So when our local ag advisor visited our place on a sunny summer day between my eighth grade and freshman years to help me choose an FFA 'SOEP' (Supervised Occupational Experience Project? Gosh, it's been a long time...) we discussed all the common options (sheep, pigs, crops, cows, mechanics and equipment), but briefly. He suggested a greenhouse project that was such a natural fit it stuck with me, and my mom, as we supplied our small town with bedding plants for the next twenty years. Among the various reference materials we used to construct the greenhouse and develop our processes, I owe a lot of our immediate and long-lasting success to this book, Park's Success with Seeds. It is the most comprehensive reference I've ever used for selecting and propagating seeds and plants.

From the introduction to the glossary this book is easy to read, with detailed, accurate descriptions of practically every process you might use for choosing, propagating, and planting seeds. Beginning with the variety of supplies you will need on hand, the author, Ann Reilly, steps through the why's and how's of containers, lights, soils and other planting media, watering, temperature control, humidity and fertilizer. Her suggestions for alternate materials can save you time and money, proving that much can be accomplished with items you already have on hand (or in the trash can!) to start your own garden or houseplants.

As a fourteen-year-old embarking on an endeavor even her gardening grandma's had never really explored in depth, this was foundational information that made an impression. Our greenhouse was built, supplied, and used for years based on the basic information in Success with Seeds. It was as much a textbook as any I've ever used in a class.

Ann's detailed plant identification material in Success with Seeds is exemplary. If you never intend to plant your own seeds, this book is still a fabulous help to choosing the plants you will use for your windows, gardens, and beds. Starting with a listing of plant families, the book includes pictures of not only mature plants by genus, but photos of sprouts and first true leaves with individual descriptions on about one thousand specific species. (This has helped me distinguish weeds from keepers for many years!) The descriptions include genus and species, common name, origins, hardiness, uses, habit, germination needs, and culture. This large section is the part that was recommended reference in the recent January newsletter to accompany seed catalogue shopping. It is as relevant now as it was in the seventies when this book was published. There are many current books and magazines available for newer varieties, but this book is still a reliable starting point and includes basic information that is helpful in understanding the origins and growing requirements of modern hybrids as well.



The appendix seems page-thin compared with the photo section, but the information there is incredibly helpful. There are excellent listings for "PLANTS FOR EASY CULTIVATION (Perfect for beginners or children)", "SEEDS THAT REQUIRE SPECIAL TREATMENT" (darkness, soaking, light, stratification, scarification, etc.), and "PLANTS FOR SPECIAL PLACES". It also includes a glossary, and a cross reference index to help you find the botanical name if you only know a common name for a plant. There are garden layout and plant recommendations for several types of gardens, and then a great pronunciation guide and hardiness map (1978) at the end.

There are other titles in this *Park's Success* series – Success with Herbs and Success with Bulbs – which I have never read or used but which may be equally valuable reference books. It seems there was only ever one edition published, which makes finding any copies a challenge and new copies are sort of like hen's teeth. My daughter has my first copy now, so I searched the world and bought a used copy recently for myself on Amazon. Now I can refresh my memory as I sort through these seed packets and catalogues...

Submitted By Corinna Sinclair



People who spend a lot of time in touch with and learning about the natural world (like gardeners) soon become aware that nothing in a natural ecosystem is ever unused waste. What looks like waste—for example, animal droppings or dead leaves—becomes food for other organisms. Nutrients cycle round and round forever.

Only in a man-made system do things become linear. There is waste—materials that do not feed other beings but go straight into a landfill or on the side of a road or into the rivers and oceans. And man is also the creator of plastic that, so far, no organisms can digest, so it seems that it will last forever, undigested and intact.

The following is an eloquent essay on this phenomenon printed in “Resurgence and Ecologist” magazine in the September/October 2016 issue. We would do well to choose to live under the laws of Earth and revise our economic laws to coincide with Earth’s laws. No better place to begin than in our gardens.

JUST SO MUCH, AND NO MORE

By Donella Meadows

The first commandment of economics is Grow. Grow forever. Companies must get bigger. National economies need to swell by a certain percentage each year. People should want more, make more, earn more, spend more—ever more.

The first commandment of the Earth is Enough. Just so much, and no more. Just so much soil. Just so much water. Just so much sunshine. Everything born of the Earth grows to its appropriate size and then stops. The planet does not get bigger; it gets better. Its creatures learn, mature, diversify, evolve, create amazing beauty and novelty and complexity, but live within absolute limits.

Economics says: Compete. Only by pitting yourself against a worthy opponent will you perform efficiently. The reward for successful competition will be growth.

The Earth says: Compete, yes, but keep your competition in bounds. Don’t annihilate. Take only what you need. Leave your competitor enough to live. Wherever possible, don’t compete: cooperate. Pollinate each other, create shelter for each other, build firm structures that lift smaller species up to the light. Pass around the nutrients, share the territory. Some kinds of excellence rise out of competition; other kinds rise out of cooperation. You’re not in a war: you’re in a community.

Economics says: Use it up fast. Don’t bother with repair; the faster you use it up, the sooner you’ll buy another. That makes the gross national product go round. Throw things out when you get tired of them. Shave the forests every 30 years. Get the oil out of the ground and burn it now. Make jobs so people can earn money, so they can buy more stuff and throw it out.

The Earth says: What’s the hurry? Take your time building soils, forests, coral reefs, mountains. Take centuries or millennia. When any part wears out, don’t discard it: turn it into food for something else.

Economics says: Worry, struggle, be dissatisfied. The permanent condition of humankind is scarcity. The only way out of scarcity is to accumulate and hoard, though that means, regrettably, that others will have less.

The Earth says: Rejoice! You have been born into a world of self-maintaining abundance and incredible beauty. Feel it, taste it, be amazed by it. If you stop your struggle and lift your eyes long enough to see Earth’s wonders, to play and dance with the glories around you, you will discover what you really need. It isn’t that much. There is enough.

We don’t get to choose which laws—those of the economy or those of the Earth—will ultimately prevail. We can choose which ones we will personally live under—and whether to make our economic laws consistent with planetary ones, or to find out what happens if we don’t.

Submitted by Ann Guthals

APRIL 18
~**BLGS LIBRARY**~
LAWN CARE

MAY 2
~ **ARBOR DAY** ~
LAUREL
Murry Park
9 - 12

MAY 4
~ **ARBOR DAY** ~
BILLINGS
VETERANS PARK
7:30 - 1

MAY 20
~**GERANIUM FEST**~
ZOO MONTANA
10 - 4



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Mike Garvey Presentation on Historic and Unique Trees that can be Found in in Our Community

PAGE 8

Mike Garvey has an intense interest in trees and has identified, photographed and studied over 15,000 trees in our area. Mike Garvey stressed the need for large long-living trees. Besides giving great shade, the trees make for a healthy environment – taking in CO₂ and giving off oxygen. Their large root systems capture a large amount of run-off and prevent erosion. Large trees also increase property values. When you consider all the benefits of a large tree and put a price tag on its value, the tree can be worth thousands and thousands of dollars.

The majority of trees originally planted in our community represent a first generation of species that are nearing the end of their safe and useful life expectancy. Mike Garvey has documented and taken pictures of heritage trees in our downtown area that have been here since on or before 1900. For instance, the vase-shaped American elms currently growing on the Yellowstone courthouse lawn were planted in 1902. Also, Mike has done the documentation to get a catalpa, a ginkgo and a bristle cone pine tree that are growing in the Billings area listed in Montana's Biggest Trees Registry.

Over the past 125 years countless heritage trees of Billings have died or are dying from old age, harsh climate conditions, disease and human-caused neglect. Garvey suggested that we should be getting clones from these long-lived and majestic trees. His thinking is that these trees have been able to survive because they have the genetics that match the environment.

Mike Garvey has noticed that landscapers and homeowners in the Billings area commonly replace the older dying trees with a limited variety of quick-growing, short-living, disease and insect prone trees with quaking aspen and green ash being some of the most overused. However, in his study and search to identify trees in our area, he has come across rarely seen species growing quite successfully. He showed beautiful photos he had taken around Billings of black locust, catalpa, white spruce, American Larch, Northern red oak, bur oak, redbud, Ginkgo, tulip tree, Kentucky coffee tree, American yellowwood, golden chain, Pierson ironwood, shellbark hickory, bristle cone pine, common pear, Ohio buckeye, purple robe locust, yellowhorn, hackberry, and autumn blaze maple.

Mike Garvey believes we should be optimistic and not let the weird storms that have hit our area in the last couple of years prevent us from planting trees. Also, he thinks we should be a bit adventurous and plant a larger variety of trees some of which are slow-growing but have fewer diseases and longer lifespan.

Mike Garvey's study of trees has led him to pay close attention to the soil and how important organic matter, microbial activity and drainage are for the tree's health. When planting a tree, he suggested leaving some of the clumps of dirt intact to help keep the microbial make-up of the soil. Overwatering interferes with the trees ability to respire and according to Garvey is the major cause of death for newly planted trees. Also he feels the need to have plenty of room for the roots to grow. He showed pictures that were taken in downtown Billings of newly planted trees on tiny boulevards giving the roots nowhere to go. (He called these tree coffins.) Mike's talk was very informative and we came away with a wealth of information.

Submitted by Elaine Allard

*He that
plants trees
loves others
besides him-
self – Chinese
proverb*



**The mission of the
Yellowstone County
Master Gardener
Newsletter is to
“educate and in-
form”, not to advo-
cate or persuade. The
Newsletter Editorial Board
takes no position endorsing
or opposing, approving or
disapproving, any of the
assertions or arguments in
the contributed infor-
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Biggest 'Timber!'

Champion cottonwood felled
in Joliet LOCAL & STATE, PAGE B1



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Montana's Biggest Trees Registry

The Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation keeps records on the largest trees in the state. These trees have been catalogued as the largest representatives of their particular species discovered so far. From looking at past registries, it appears that most of these record trees are located in the northwestern part of the state. However, many species of Montana trees have not yet been nominated and there is a special category for urban trees. There is no funding to support this program; its success is mostly dependent on the volunteer efforts. Forms and technical directions on how to measure a tree for nomination can be found on-line <http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/forestry-assistance/montana-big-trees-program> Maybe like me, this will perk your interest in becoming a “Big Tree Hunter”. Is there a “specimen big tree” in your yard or neighborhood? Or, will one of us find a tree to nominate in one of our outdoor adventures across the state? (By the way, if you really get into this, there is also a national big tree registry. <http://www.americanforests.org/bigtree>)

An excellent reference book on trees: Michael Dirr's Manual of Woody Landscape Plants.

Submitted by Elaine Allard



<http://www.co.yellowstone.mt.gov/extension/horticulture/mastergard.asp>

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INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL DAYTON

After a solid winter in Montana that first warm spell is hard to resist. For some of us it's the bright packets of seeds that start to show up in stores, for some the dog-eared seed catalogues, for others the smell of waking earth puts us right over the edge. We tend to seek out our favorite places to buy garden or seed starting supplies, and one of my favorites is Harvest Tech.

When I first got to Billings (about six years ago) I worked down the street from Heightened Harvest. Since then that neighborhood, 1415 S. 32nd Street West, has changed a little (they have new neighbors) and so has the sign out front. Michael Dayton is now co-owner with his wife, Amanda Williams, and they've changed the name to Harvest Tech. Mike owned the business with his brother (its first location in the Heights opened about eight years ago) and in late summer last year bought out his interest. On my most recent visit I found the store to be as tantalizing as the first time I saw it.



I have a greenhouse background so on my first visit I couldn't help but wish I'd lived closer to this place during those twenty years. One can set up a complete hydroponic operation with supplies bought here, but their real priority is natural and organic gardening. Mike kindly granted me a little impromptu time for a quick chat over the counter. I asked if he was a Master Gardener - he was immediately familiar with the program but he (like me until recently) hadn't been able to put together both the time and the timing to commit to it himself. As I explained my role with the newsletter, we talked about our gardening roots a bit. Mike doesn't remember NOT gardening, really - "Mom had a 2000 square-foot organic garden" at their home here in Billings, so it was just part of life growing up. He's lived other places, too, but never really had the chance to garden anywhere but here.

Mike is an avid gardener of things to eat. His preference is to "grow small", using pots and containers to conserve space and to give each plant the environment it likes best. I asked if he chooses specific species for container gardening, and he said he really doesn't and that often he finds the fruits and vegetables, like his tomatoes, tend to be sweeter and more flavorful even though yields might be smaller. His eyes twinkled a little, and then I understood what he meant when he told me his favorite part of gardening was eating... He does prefer to start plants from seed but finds it difficult to stay away from the nurseries with all the new varieties and ready-to-plant starts.

We agreed that one of the most challenging things about gardening here is timing plantings with the shifts between winter and spring and spring and summer. Cold frames and the right protection can help, but one of those fast, late spring freezes can overwhelm your plans quickly and set you back to starting over. Mike mentioned that one of his peeves is wind, which can also wreak havoc quickly, burning tender leaves and drying out even the most carefully watered garden.

Mike likes to use automatic watering, called micro-irrigation when used specifically for pots and containers, to address the problems that wind, drought, and heat can dish up. This frees up time and helps him keep things balanced even in the extremes we can endure in our summer months.

I asked Mike what kinds of things he does to avoid the dangers of gardening, like blisters, sore muscles, bug bites, and heat stroke. He had to think about this one for a minute, as if it wasn't something that he did on purpose. As we talked he realized that he does several things that probably make a big difference in keeping him out of harm's way. He gardens in the morning and evening, avoiding the heat of the day, but if he has to be out later in the morning or into the afternoon he wears long sleeves, hats, and sunscreen. He wears leather gloves as a rule, as well as long pants and sturdy shoes. We determined this is probably why he isn't bothered much by bug bites and stings, sore muscles, and other injuries.



I had a great chat with Mike, and I couldn't help but look around the store and ask what he thought was going to be a hot item this year. It's blueberry tomato seeds... Yep, I'll be back!

Submitted by Corinna Sinclair