

# THE GARDENER



*Newsletter of the Bowie-Crofton Garden Club*

<http://www.bcgardenclub.org>

<http://www.meetup.com/Bowie-Crofton-Garden-Club/>

*The aims of the Bowie-Crofton Garden Club shall be to promote interest in and develop skills in gardening through cooperation, joint efforts, and good fellowship.*

## May 2010

### Next Monthly Meeting

By *Neil Potash*

The next Garden Club meeting will take place in the multi-purpose room of the Bowie City Hall, 2614 Kenhill Drive, Bowie, MD 20715 on Tuesday, May 25, 2010 at 7:30 PM. Program TBD.

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### Presidents Comments

by *Jesse Terres*

I was going to write on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) until I saw this shocking article on tomatoes in The Washington Post. Can you believe it? Store bought tomatoes as tasty as homegrown tomatoes! I'll believe it when I taste one. You've always been able to purchase delicious tomatoes in the summer months from roadside stands, but seldom from grocery stores. The grocery folks just don't seem to have the time, patience, enthusiasm, expertise, or interest to deal with the homegrown varieties that the locals do. Time is money and money is the bottom line. Even then you have to be careful when purchasing locally.

The article: "The Next best thing" by Barry Estabrooke says "In supermarket tomatodom, this is the Holy Grail: a fruit thick-skinned enough to shrug off the insults of modern agribusiness, but still tender at heart and tasting like, well, a tomato. And John "Jay" Scott might have discovered it.

Scott is a horticulture professor and tomato breeder at the University of Florida's Gulf Coast Research and Education Center outside Tampa. For more than a decade, he has worked to perfect a tomato variety called Tasti-Lee. This spring Tasti-Lee left the rarefied confines of academic test plots and rigorously monitored consumer-tasting panels to make its way in the competitive hurly-burly of Florida's \$619 million tomato industry. The state produces about half of the fresh tomatoes grown in the United States; between October and June, virtually all fresh, field-grown tomatoes come from Florida. The high-stakes business is littered with once-promising but now-forgotten tomato varieties.

If Tasti-Lee lives up to its early promise, Scott, who has bred between 30 and 40 new tomato varieties (I haven't gone back and counted in a while) over nearly four decades, will achieve a plant breeder's version of immortality. And the rest of us finally will be able to head to the local supermarket any day of the year and bring home a nutritious, decent-tasting tomato.

Just remember, if it needs to ripen a bit DO NOT PLACE IT IN THE WINDOW SILL! The sun will cook it and destroy the flavor.

Next time, IPM! Are you spraying too much or using the wrong spray or spraying at the wrong time? That's what my next message is all about.

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## Meeting Minutes, April 27, 2010

No minutes submitted this month.

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### Election of Officers

By *Rich Dodson*, Nominating Committee

The three offices that were scheduled to be filled (this being an **even year**) were:

#### **1st V.P., Programs**

Neal Potash agreed to stand for reelection, and there being no other nominations, was elected by acclamation.

#### **3rd V.P., Plant Exchanges / Door Prizes**

Gaye Williams agreed to be nominated by the nominating committee; however Eleanor Leshinsky was nominated from the floor. Gaye Williams withdrew and Eleanor was elected by acclamation.

#### **Secretary**

Janelle Dietrich agreed to be nominated by the nominating committee and, there being no other nominations, was elected by acclamation. The membership was informed of the health problems Janelle's mother has recently experienced (fall/broken hip surgery), so Paula Mitchell has agreed to serve as Janelle's back-up to take minutes on those occasions when Janelle must be away to care of her mother.)

Although not scheduled for regular elections (this being an even year), the following actions also took place:

#### **2nd V.P., Membership, Odd years**

Brian Swetnam was voted by the membership to complete the unexpired term as 2nd V.P., Membership; a position to which he was appointed earlier this year.

#### **4th V.P., Public Relations, Odd years**

Dorothy Bice had indicated that she must resign for personal reasons. Karen Woolfley had agreed to allow her name to be placed in nomination to complete the unexpired term as 4th V.P., Public Relations. There being no other nominations, Karen was elected by acclamation.

#### **Treasurer, Odd years**

Joan Walker was voted by the membership to complete the unexpired term as Treasurer; a position to which she was appointed earlier this year.

I guess we ended up electing/reelecting everyone except the President's position, which is not due for reelection until next year (an odd year).

## Propagation from Softwood Cuttings

By *Rich Dodson* - Master Gardener

With the B-CGC Garden Club's Annual Plant Sale behind us, it's time to turn our thoughts to planting our plant sale purchases and looking around our yards and gardens to see what is missing. Perhaps it is a tree/shrub that was on your want list, but it wasn't offered at the plant sale.

Find a gardening friend (perhaps a garden club member) who has that coveted tree/shrub you have been wanting for your yard/garden. Surely they wouldn't mind sharing a cutting of that long wanted tree/shrub. One of the easiest ways to start a vegetative clone of that tree/shrub from your want list is by doing propagation from a softwood cutting.

Propagation of softwood cuttings is usually done at the end of May or the beginning of June depending on the climate you are in. Trying to do softwood cuttings prior to that is a waste of time, because the wood is too soft and will wilt down very quickly. The ideal time to take softwood cuttings is just as the wood begins to harden off.

The only difference between a softwood cutting and a hardwood cutting is the time of year you take the cutting. Both are of the current season's growth. It is always recommended that the cuttings you use are of the current year's growth. If you go too deep into a plant to take your cuttings, you are likely to get into wood that is more than one year old. Using this older wood is almost certain to negatively impact your success rate.

Softwood cuttings of many deciduous plants root very quickly and easily under the right conditions. Controlling those conditions is critical. Softwood cuttings are very delicate and can dehydrate very easily, especially under the summer sun. However, with the warm temperatures of June, and the tenderness of softwood cuttings, root development will occur very quickly, if you can keep the cuttings from dehydrating.

The absolute best way to root softwood cuttings is by sticking them in a bed of very course sand and watering them very lightly for just a few seconds, every five or ten minutes, for a period of two to six weeks. Of course this is impossible, unless you have an automatic watering system known as an intermittent mist system.

Intermittent Misting is essential in propagating plants. It enables a propagator to quickly and cost effectively produce new plants. However, with the benefits come negative impacts on nutrients within the cuttings. Not knowing how your cuttings are performing can cause them to form roots too slowly, not form roots at all, or cause them to die. Unrooted cuttings rely on their reserves of nutrients to survive until they form roots. Until the cuttings actually form roots, they do not absorb new nutrients from the rooting media. The cuttings get those reserves from the parent stock plant from which the cutting was taken.

Cuttings absorb nutrients from the rooting media or potting media once they form roots, but until the root formation occurs, there is leaching of the nutrients from within the cutting. Hardwood cuttings are more susceptible to leaching than softwood cuttings, because the softwood cuttings retain more nutrients in their cell walls making the nutrients harder to leach out. The level of nutrients in the cuttings is highest when first taken from stock plants, declines as the cutting is rooting, and increases again once roots develop. Nitrogen, phosphorus, calcium, magnesium, iron and boron are the most likely nutrients to be leached out of cuttings while being misted. The result usually will be first seen as foliar deficiencies. These deficiencies may be yellowing of the leaves, spotting, and other symptoms. Most home propagators do not have the facilities to properly test for nutrient leaching. So what should you do?

- Be sure the stock plant you will be taking your cuttings from is healthy and well fed with fertilizer before actually taking the cuttings. This will ensure that the cuttings you take will have the maximum amount of nutrients in them. Ensuring the cuttings have high nutrient levels increases your odds of them surviving past the critical stage of when the unrooted cutting turns into a cutting with roots that are able to absorb new nutrients from the soil.
- Do small scale tests and record your findings. Add a small amount of slow release fertilizer to your rooting media. This will ensure the cutting will have nutrients available when it needs them. Too little fertilizer is better than too much! Note which plants do best and the amount of fertilizer you used.

Good record keeping will enable you to duplicate the process when you find the one that works. Your records will also keep you from making the same mistakes over and over again!

- Do not over mist. Over misting leaches nutrients from the cuttings much faster. You want to keep the leaves of the cutting moist but not too wet. On the other hand, never let the cuttings wilt during the misting process.

Why not use liquid water-soluble fertilizer like Miracle Grow?

- It leaches out of the rooting media too quickly.
- Some cuttings do not do well when the fertilizer is applied directly to the leaves or stems.

Paying careful attention to your stock plant's nutritional health before taking cuttings is one of the easiest methods you can do to be sure your cuttings have the nutrients available to them during the rooting process.

- **Article Sources:** [http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Dane\\_Wilson](http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Dane_Wilson)
- **Mike McGroarty's Book,** <http://www.freeplants.com/easy-plant-propagation.htm>

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## Baltimore Herb Festival

Mark your calendar now for the 23rd annual Baltimore Herb Festival being held on Saturday, 29 May in Leakin Park from 10-3. All sorts of vendors will sell books, herbs, native and other plants, lawn art, food.....and more. The event is easy to get to: take exit 16[rt.70] off the BALT. beltway toward Baltimore. Turn onto Security Blvd, then rt. at 1st light [Forest Park Ave.] Rt. on Windsor Mill Rd. [the park is on right]. follow signs to free parking and entrance. \$5 to get in. You can also visit [www.baltimoreherbfestival.com](http://www.baltimoreherbfestival.com) for info and directions. I go every year, fill tote bags. Many folks bring wagons for their loot. Get there early for parking.

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## BCGC Annual Picnic

Mark that calendar for the club picnic, 12 June at Highbridge Park. There will be a sign-up list at the 25 May club meeting or email Gaye at [williagl@mda.state.md.us](mailto:williagl@mda.state.md.us) with your proposed contribution and number of people. Some giveaway plants usually appear as well.



# Fay's Bloomers



Specializing in Daylilies

Official Display Garden of the  
*American Hemerocallis Society*

You are cordially invited to visit our Garden anytime during the growing season, which is from the last week of June through September. Peak bloom time is the last week of June through the third week of July.

**Directions from Rt. 50:** Take the Rt. 424 (Davidsonville) exit south towards Davidsonville. Continue on Rt. 424 until you get to the intersection of Rt. 424 and Central Avenue (Rt. 214). Make a right at the light (there is a turn-off lane) onto Central Avenue (Rt. 214) and go west for about 3/4 of a mile. Make a left onto Foxhall Drive (we are across the street from Lakemont Memorial Garden and the Davidsonville Elementary School). We are the 5th house on the right – 3508 Foxhall Drive, Davidsonville, MD 21035. Parking is available on the street.

Please call ahead of time so the garden can look it's best when you arrive. Our phone number is 410-798-9207. We look forward to your visit!

*Faith & Jerry Bange*

*"My garden is my greatest diversion, and I want all the prettiest flowers and shrubs."*

*Rosalie Stier Calvert, 16 April 1808*



*Members of the Master Gardeners are cordially invited to Riversdale House Museum's **Garden Party**, a celebration of gardening past and present. Begun in 1801, Riversdale was home to Rosalie Stier Calvert and her husband, George Calvert. Rosalie enjoyed a lifelong love of gardening, a legacy that has been treasured and preserved.*

*Share this legacy as you learn about the new projects and endeavors taking place in Riversdale's interpretive garden! Mingle with fellow local gardening clubs as you take part in activities, specialized tours of the house and historic kitchen garden and orchard, and enjoy a foodways demonstration in the open-hearth dependency kitchen.*

*Light refreshments will be served.*

***Sunday, May 23***

*Optional, guided tours of the house begin promptly at 2:15 pm*

*Garden Party festivities begin at 3:15 pm*

*4811 Riverdale Road*

*Riverdale Park, MD 20737*

***Please R.S.V.P. by Monday, May 17 to (301) 864-0420***

*with the number of members attending.*

*We look forward to hearing from you!*

# Weed Chip Mulch: Landscape Boon or Bane?

By *Linda Chalker-Scott*, Ph.D., Master Gardener

**Concern:** Wood chip mulches will tie up nitrogen and cause deficiencies in plants.

**Evidence:** Actually, many studies have demonstrated that woody mulch materials increase nutrient levels in soils and/or associated plant foliage. My hypothesis is that a zone of nitrogen deficiency exists at the mulch/soil interface, inhibiting weed seed germination while having no influence upon established plant roots below the soil surface. For this reason, it is inadvisable to use high C:N mulches in annual beds or vegetable gardens where the plants of interest do not have deep, extensive root systems.

**Concern:** Woody mulches will attract termites, carpenter ants, and other pests.

**Evidence:** Many wood-based mulches are not attractive to pest insects but are actually insect repellent. For instance, cedar (*Thuja*) species produce thujone, which repels clothes moths, cockroaches, termites, carpet beetles, Argentine ants, and odorous house ants. In general, termites prefer higher nutrient woody materials, such as cardboard, rather than wood chips.

## Application

**Let wood chips age before using them if there are concerns about disease.** Personally, I have never done this; I happen to love the smell of fresh wood chips and enjoy spreading them out over the landscape. Additionally, some of the nutrient value (particularly nitrogen if the chips contain leaves or needles) will be lost in the composting process. Using fresh chips ensures that some of the foliar nitrogen will feed the landscape rather than the compost pile.

**Before installing wood chips, create a thin underlying layer of a more nutrient-rich mulch (like compost) if there are concerns about nutrient deficiencies.** This “mulch sandwich” approach is a logical one that mimics what you would see in the mulch layer of a forest ecosystem. It’s not required, though, and over time a wood chip mulch will develop this same structure as the lower layers break down.

**Begin mulch application before annual weeds are established.** Mulch is most effective in suppressing weeds when weeds are not yet present on site. Therefore, bare soil should be mulched as soon as practical, especially in the spring and fall when weed seed germination is at its peak. If this is not possible, the most effective, non-chemical way to remove weeds prior to mulching is to mow them as close to the ground as possible, followed immediately by mulching.

**Prune or mow perennial weeds at the root crown in early spring when root resources are lowest (generally just as leaf growth begins).** Extensive pulling of perennial weeds from unprotected soil is not recommended, as this disturbance will increase erosion, especially in sandy soils or in sloped areas. It is better to keep unprotected soil undisturbed. However, you can pull resprouting perennial weeds covered in mulch; the mulch layer prevents erosion and facilitates pulling.

**Remove all noxious weed materials from site to prevent rerooting or seeding.** Self explanatory!

**Install chips to the desired depth.** A successful wood chip mulch must be deep enough to suppress weeds and promote healthy soils and plants: research has demonstrated that weed control is directly linked to mulch depth, as is enhanced plant performance. A review of the research on coarse organic mulches and weed control reveals that shallow mulch layers will promote weed growth and/or require additional weed control measures. I recommend 4-6 inches for ornamental sites and 8-12 inches for restoration sites and/or perennial weed problems.

**Keep mulch away from trunks of trees and shrubs.** Piling mulch against the trunks of shrubs and trees creates a dark, moist, low oxygen environment to which above-ground tissues are not adapted. Fungal diseases require a moist environment to grow and reproduce; piling mulch on the trunk provides exactly the right conditions for fungi to enter the plant. Likewise, opportunistic borers are more likely to invade a plant whose bark is wet due to excessive mulching. Rather than creating mulch volcanoes, instead taper the mulch down to nearly nothing as you approach the trunk. This donut-shaped application will protect the soil environment as well as the above-ground plant tissues.

**Replace mulch as needed to maintain desired depth; replacement rate will depend on decomposition rate.** Once mulch is applied, little management needs to be done other than reapplication to maintain minimum depth. High traffic areas are most likely to need replacement.

<b>Executive Committee</b>		
<b>President</b> Jesse Terres 301-464-5914 jessgail@verizon.net	<b>Treasurer</b> Joan Walker 301-262-6816 jb1932@verizon.net	<b>Hospitality</b> Barbara Eberstein 301-262-4112
<b>1<sup>st</sup> VP/Programs</b> Neil Potash 301-390-6572 snpotash1@juno.com	<b>Secretary</b> Kathleen Beres 301-249-1120 kabintospace@aol.com	<b>Member Garden Tours</b> Kent Winterson 301-464-0386 kwinterson@hrsa.gov
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> VP/Membership</b> Brian Swetnam 301-518-6205 bswetnam@live.com	<b>Newsletter Editor, Webmaster</b> Donald Sminkey 301-512-3048 gardener@bcgardenclub.org	<b>Sunshine</b> Barbara Eberstein 301-262-4112
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> VP/Plant Exchange</b> Joan Walker 301-262-6816 jb1932@verizon.net	<b>Field Trips</b> Karen Anadol 301-249-2050 Klanadol@yahoo.com	<b>Historian</b> Francisco Román 202-262-9360 ciscoroman@comcast.net
<b>4<sup>th</sup> VP/Public Relations</b> Dorothy Bice 301-464-3748 debice@netzero.net	<b>Plant Sale</b> Barbara Eberstein 301-262-4112	

**From the Editor**

Donald Sminkey

All members of the Garden Club are welcome to write an article on a gardening-related subject. Please send via e-mail to:

gardener@bcgardenclub.org. Include "B-CGC" or "Garden Club" in the subject heading; or mail to: Donald Sminkey, 508 Otway Road, Wake Forest, NC 27587

**Deadline, May issue: May 8, 2010**

Bowie-Crofton Garden Club  
 P.O. Box 2115  
 Bowie, MD 20718-2115