Good humor is a state of mind; it seems to say to Nature that we take her more seriously than she takes us.

Ernest Renan

Coordinator's Comments

By Dustin Hinrichs

Welcome back to the Germinator! This December please focus on two things for me. First, please turn in the volunteer and education hours that you have accomplished during the 2005 calendar year prior to December 31, 2005. Last year I was still receiving hours in April… The state Master Gardener office wants the county program coordinators to submit their annual reports as soon as possible after December 31, so please do your part and turn in those hours. Second, have a great time with your family and friends and enjoy your Christmas and New Years Day holidays.

A quick reminder: please be on the lookout for the Winter Gardening Fair volunteer signup sheet. A mailing is planned for the first week of December. If you don’t receive your signup sheet by December 14, please contact me and let me know. We need a lot of help to make this a special day once again. Last year I had a great time getting to know all of the speakers and society representatives!

As gardeners this is the time of year when we have the opportunity to dream big while we’re leafing through the seed catalogs and making our garden wish list for the coming spring. Take full advantage and have fun out there.

Thanks for all that you do to make this program so incredible.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

MG Class of 2004

Congratulations to all in the MG intern class of 2004 who accomplished their 40 hours of volunteer time in 2005. Official MG name badges were presented to the following individuals during the Fall Celebration on November 3: Laura Allard, Laurie Azeltine, Barbara Brown, Carol Bruch, Larry Dawson, Doug Smith, Glenn Babinat, Lori Klopfenstein, James Kurtzleben, Jay McWherter, Matt Pieper, Fran Potratz, Patrick Ryan and Carol Sears. The 2004 class is a dedicated group and we look forward to lots of continued service to the Linn County MG program from these new MGs.

Terra Cotta Fountain Class

Have you ever wanted to learn how to build a terra cotta fountain? Linn County Master Gardener Deb Walser will be teaching a class on just that subject on Saturday December 10th at the Extension Office from 10-11:00 am. The class is a great opportunity to build your own fountain and be prepared to help with the class at the Winter Gardening Fair. There is a materials fee to offset the cost of materials and the small electric pump. Please call the Extension Office (377-9839) or Deb Walser (378-4243) if you are interested. Hurry, space is limited to 10!

MASTER GARDENER EVENTS

Dec. 6, 6:30 pm. Steering Committee Meeting. Extension Office.
Dec. 10, 10-11:00 am Terra Cotta Fountain Class. Extension Office.
Dec. (date TBA), Lowe Park Demonstration Gardens Planning Meeting. Extension Office.

The Extension Office will be closed for the holidays on December 23 & 26.
Volunteer Spotlight on — KATHY KNIGHT

Kathy was introduced to gardening at a very young age helping her parents take care of a large garden in Blairstown. Her primary assigned task was weeding and that did not inspire her to become a gardener. Later as an adult, one of Kathy’s fellow bluegrass band musicians introduced her to the fascinating world of hostas. This led her to create what she calls a “hippie” garden: a potpourri of plants that provide a variety of colors, textures and shapes (but no cannabis), within a small space surrounded by a white picket fence. She is particularly fond of lilies, both day lilies and true lilies.

In 2002 Kathy noticed an announcement in The Gazette about the Master Gardener program and decided to apply. At the first class she was surprised to find that two of her church friends, Roxie Goetz and Cathy Cook, were also MG interns. (Each had applied without knowing the plans of the others.) Kathy enjoys doing a variety of MG projects, including helping with the Winter Gardening Fair, assisting at the Spring Plant Sale, helping with the Brucemore Garden & Landscape Show, and writing for the Germinator.

Kathy’s gardening volunteer activities extend beyond the MG program. She and Deb Walser develop garden and landscape plans for their church and oversee a team of 14 volunteers in caring for the gardens.

Kathy’s desire to share her knowledge and talents with others has led her to be a part of mission trip to Mozambique in the summer of 2006. The adventurous mission group will assist an orphanage to improve their hospital and schools, as well as their agriculture system and fish farms.

Now that Kathy has retired from her job at Quaker Oats, she has more time to enjoy her back yard where an occasional bluegrass jam fest breaks out. Even when she is not home, her friends are drawn to her gardens for quiet reflection and inspiration.

Stop by Kathy’s garden in northeast Cedar Rapids. Even if you do not hear any bluegrass notes, you can still enjoy her “hippie” garden.

Interview by Roger Strohbehn.
Things We Love
Phabulous Phaleonopsis
By Larry Dawson

Orchids always seemed to me to be an exotic, delicate plant that was hard to grow and definitely too difficult for me. When I received a white Phaleonopsis orchid with its broad flat leaves at my mother’s funeral, I was very pleased and challenged to learn how to keep it alive and get it to bloom again. I was amazed that the blossoms lasted from late November to January!

I went online to research the Phaleonopsis orchid and then to Barnes and Noble to purchase a book specifically about the Phaleonopsis orchid. I learned that this orchid in nature, is found high in the trees in tropical jungles just under the leaf canopy of the trees. It is one of the easiest orchids to grow with blooms lasting up to four months.

The Phaleonopsis orchid has a few basic needs. The two most important needs are light and water. It needs bright light for at least six hours a day but no direct sunlight. If the leaves are a light to medium green then the orchid is getting sufficient light. If the leaves are dark green then more light is needed. Water the orchid once a week, soaking the planting medium. Let the pot drain making sure that the pot does not stand in water as the roots will rot and the plant will die. It is also recommended that you fertilize about once a month with a weak orchid fertilizer available in most garden centers. The Phaleonopsis orchid endures the same temperatures that humans do so no special adjustments are needed.

The Phaleonopsis orchid comes in a variety of colors including white, lavender, pink, yellow, and green. You can find striped, spotted, and those with a combination of colors. The one blooming for me now is pale yellow with a rust colored throat.

I found that when the days get longer in spring my orchids grew flower spikes and I had five orchids blooming into June. They bloom once a year but sometimes can bloom again in less than a year when, after the blossoms drop off, you trim the flower spike above the fourth node. Their blooms have five petals and are known as “moth orchids.” There are also miniature Phaleonopsis orchids with blossoms one and a half inches wide. My largest is a lavender one with five inch blooms.

As the orchids come into bloom I move them from their west shaded window to the family room for our enjoyment. The pots the orchids grow in are not always pretty so this allows you to find an attractive display pot for their temporary home. We have purchased a ceramic pot with no drainage hole that fits in with our décor in our home. My favorite, however, is an antique oak paint bucket that I bought at an antique show. It is perfect when fitted with a liner to hold water that needs to be checked frequently and emptied.

When you find one of these exotic plants don’t hesitate to pick one up for your home. They are fun and easy to grow.

Winter Gardening Fair
Linn County MGS are sponsoring the premier gardening education event for area gardeners on January 21, 2006 at Kirkwood Community College. (Over 850 people attended WGF classes in 2005.) Lots of MG volunteers are needed to successfully conduct this event. You will soon receive a volunteer sign-up sheet in the mail for you to indicate when and how you can help with the Fair.

If you want to attend any of the classes to gain education hours, a list of the classes and registration steps can be found at the KCC web site: www.foyourlifet ime.com. Click on ‘Search for Courses’; in the topic box select ‘Family-Lawn & Garden’; and click on ‘search’.

Service Record Report
One last service record is due to report your volunteer and education hours for 2005. Your report is needed to enable Dustin Hinrichs to make his annual program report to the ISU Master Gardeners office in a timely manner. Please get your fourth quarter report to the Extension Office by December 31. You may estimate your volunteer time for service you expect to do in December. Go to https://www.extension.iastate.edu/linn/info/mastergardener/Info+for+MG+and+Interns.htm then click on one of the options to download a service record form.