



The Dirt

Carroll County Master Gardener Newsletter

April, 2008

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From the Editor's Desk:

Many of you have expressed the desire to improve *The Dirt's* appearance. April's issue presents a new layout we hope you will like. The black columns of ink are gone, replaced with a cleaner, greener look. Thank you to Alden Stallings for finding this new template and to Sheila Whiteley for

her willingness to make the switch and persistence in mastering its quirks.

Continuing with our biographical interviews, we hope you'll enjoy reading about Joan Rutz, this month's featured MG.

We hope you'll take the time to read Calvin Bey's article

on compost. It dispels the notion that you can't use too much of it in the garden.

And at long last, the Corner Book Review, featuring our own Linda Rogers...

THE CORNER BOOK REVIEW

The Winter Garden

By Eluned Price

Smithmark Publishing

Reviewed by Linda Rogers

This book focuses on the bone structure of a garden as seen during the magical winter months and attempts to explain what it is that makes a setting fascinating. The author tries to show how to look at and appreciate form. Garden structure may be formed by architecture or by planted trees and shrubs. Structure can be formal and elegant or eccentric and playful.

Plan for a winter landscape. Look at the shapes formed by trees. Plant winter-blooming plants. Interesting plants are photographed together. Two of my favorite photographs included a lenten rose planted with daffodils or with snowdrops intermingled and a mahonia underplanted with oleander. A clean sweep of ground can be planted with a blanket of naturalized bulbs. Grasses and red-twigged dogwoods are favorite structural plants. A mood can be

set—romantic, mysterious, operatic, witty or powerful.

Thirty-seven pages are devoted to over 100 wonderful winter plants that are reliably hardy. They are each pictured and their form is discussed. The correct growing zone is also noted. Some are very familiar plants (ajuga, crocus) and some are not so familiar (callicarpia bodinieri, Mexican orange blossom). This is fun reading for a winter evening. It gave me a lot to think about.

Meet Joan Rutz ~ *An interview by Sharon Dahl*

Ever since she was 18 years old, Joan's faith has been her guiding light. "I'd always been interested in knowing about God," she said, "but felt silly asking questions, didn't even know what questions to ask. Then a friend sent "a thirty-page letter in which he quoted from John 3:16 and many other passages which resonated with me. Hearing about his experiences in Japan led

to a number of experiences in my life. One of these experiences was my trip to Iran. I was inspired by some missionary biographies, prayed about my life and felt I was being led to Iran. I met my husband at a Christian fellowship group at Whittier College, where I later got a degree in Elementary Education. He was a businessman in Iran who had been drawn there through a direction

he felt from God. Six months after we met, I moved to Tehran where we married and lived for twenty years. That was 1959.

"The culture there was very family-centered. They were so hospitable. It was a pleasure to get to know people. There was time to do that. My children went to Community School, an international school. And then we started a small

international school, the Henry Martin School (named after a man who was first to translate the New Testament into Farsi) that they also attended.

"A big part of our lives was church-related work and worshipping with the small Christian community in Iran." In 1978, Joan and her family returned to the

"The culture (in Tehran) was very family centered. They were so hospitable."

U.S. to bring their daughter to college. They planned to spend one year here and "let our children attend American schools," but during that time, the Shah was overthrown and we were unable to return. We had such good relationships with people there. We understood that they wanted to maintain their own culture and their religion. They didn't want to be westernized. The Shah was very European.

The people reacted to that. It wasn't their roots. When the mullahs took over, it was very sad. Terrible things happened. It was very disillusioning. The people thought putting the mullahs in charge would return them to their roots, but in fact it was a more repressive and morally corrupt government than they had experienced under the Shah. "My husband returned a few times to

bring out what he could. Just walking down the street during that turmoil, he felt like a foreigner for the first time in his life there."

After returning to the U.S., they lived first in San Diego and then in Irvine. After 18 years, they decided they wanted to "get out of the city" and began "looking for rural land with water and a mild climate." Their son married a girl from Little Rock, and on a vacation

in Eureka Springs found land in Madison County. Soon, Joan and the rest of her family found some property in Kingston, where they moved in 1997.

Joan and her husband raised all of five of their children, four sons and a daughter, in Iran, although their eldest son died at age 6. From those four children come 25 grandchildren, ages 1-21. Two of their

"Even in California with a postage-stamp yard, I loved gardening."

children live within a few miles of them in Madison County, one is in San Diego and one in Seattle. "We are not Mormon or Catholic. We just love children. My daughter in San Diego has eleven children. Our son in Kingston has eight, all of whom are home-

schooled." Joan thinks that perhaps this love of children originates from the fact that she was an only child until she was 10 and a half. She begged her parents for siblings. "Big families were always important to me," she said. "And our children wanted even larger

families.

Joan said, "Even in California with a postage-stamp yard, I loved gardening. I had my bougainvillea, roses and tomatoes. Everything in California was a survivor. It didn't need a lot of attention. We discovered Arkansas gardening was

something else. When Merrily Ward asked me to join CCMG, I did. It's wonderful to share notes and try to figure everything out. Now I have three raised beds of vegetables and some flowers around the house, we have some

(Continued on page 3)

<http://www.arkansas.com/calendar>

This Web site gives many events throughout Arkansas. Many of them are FREE!

>>**Ozark Spring-time Wild-flower Weekend** Bull Shoals April 11–13. Help us celebrate Arkansas State Parks' 75th anniversary! Admission is Free, except lake and river cruises.

>>**46th Annual Arkansas Folk Festival**, April 17–

19, Court Square, Mountain View. Free admission to Crafts Village & Free shuttle from downtown to the Folk Center.

>>**Free Arbor Day Music in the Park**, Eureka Springs, April 25, 12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m., Basin Spring Park. Admission is Free!

>>**First Ever Flower & Garden Show**, Berryville Public Square, April 26, 9:00 a.m.

Admission is Free! (REMEMBER, WE ARE TO TAKE PART IN THIS ONE!!)

>>May 3-4, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., **Orchid Society of the Ozarks Spring 2008 SWROGA Meeting and Show**, Rogers. Admission is Free!

>>May 10, **26th Annual Kingston's Fair on the Square**, Admission is Free!

>>**Garden Glory Days**, May 14–24, 10:00 p.m., Ozark

Folk Center, Mountain View State Park. Admission: Regular park admission fee

>>**"Arkansas Butterflies"** May 21, Shiloh Museum of Ozark History, 118 W. Johnson Springdale. Admission is Free!

>>May 29–31 **ARKANSAS STATE MASTER GARDENER CONVENTION**, Springdale Holiday Inn & Convention Center.

Joan Rutz continued. . .

apple and pear trees as well as a peach tree. "It's still a work in progress."

Joan loves to "see things grow and flourish—plants, children, grandchildren." She's an avid reader and likes books about other cultures, "especially the Middle East—parts of our hearts are still there. We've had friends from Iran visit here and sometimes we attend an Iranian church in Tulsa."

Joan loves to walk the perimeter of the 40-acre lake adjacent

to their house, "even when it's freezing outside." In August, she and her husband will be married 49 years—certainly cause to celebrate a richly-blossoming family tree, complete with friendships across the globe.

April Calendar

April 10 ~ Opening Day of Eureka Springs Farmers' Market ~ 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The market is located at Pine Mountain Village

April 12 ~ CCMG Meeting ~ 10:00 a.m. ~ Carroll Electric ~ Speaker: Brad Hayes, owner of Accent Hardscapes, Shell Knob, will speak on "Hardscaping, the Backbone of Landscaping, Drainage and Contours"

April 19 ~ Advanced MG Training (MGs from 2005 or before) Hydrangeas and Hostas Craighead County Ext. Office Jonesboro. \$50per person. Contact Mimi Cox at 870 -932-3661 or by email at mlcox5@yahoo.com,

April 26 ~ Flower and Garden Show ~ MG will host two tables, garden art and display. The show will be held all day on the Berryville Square.

June 18–21 ~ Southern Region MG Conference "A Garden of Dreams in Native America." To register, visit www.mastergardener2008.com, Space limited. Early bird registration ends May 1!



"The average soil in Arkansas has 1.25% organic matter, and a desirable level in the garden is 5%, so compost is generally needed."

The Average Date of Last Spring Freeze for Carroll County is April 20th.

ORGANIC GARDENING and MORE

April is the month that draws a gardening crowd. Soil temperatures will soon be 50 degrees F, and there is still time to plant all the spring crops. I deal with a lot of people who are already involved or want to be involved in the organic gardening approach. Many say

that for the sake of their family's health, they don't want pesticides on their gardens and lawns. They know the facts: pesticides are toxic, they are designed to kill, and they continue to compromise human health. For anyone switching to the organic approach, it is advisable to spend

some time learning the principles and guidelines involved in the organic discipline. There are many good books on organic gardening and much information available on the web. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to call or send email.

When we think of

Use Compost Weekly, by Calvin F. Bey

going organic, we automatically think in terms of adding compost to our gardens. The average soil in Arkansas has 1.25% organic matter, and a desirable level in the garden is 5%, so compost is generally needed. The nutrient quality of the compost will only be as good as the material that went into the pile. It can vary a lot. Decomposed cotton burs are exceptionally high in potassium, and too much of that kind of compost can upset desirable mineral ratios in the soil.

How much compost to add depends on the soil's current organic matter level. It is best to think in terms of building the soil to a good organic matter and

nutrient level, and then doing a maintenance program. As a guide for starting new garden beds, I recommend double-digging garden beds at least one time. When double-digging for the first time, add 40 gallons of compost per 100 square foot to the lower layer (10-20-in.) and 20 gallons per 100 sq. ft. to the top 10 inches. While building to the 5% organic matter level, add another 20 gallons per 100 square foot for each new crop. With this plan, in three or four years you will have a crumbly, sponge-cake like soil, vastly different from the original. Once you get to the 5% organic matter level, and you get the right amounts and ratios of

minerals, and have good biological activity, the compost can likely be cut to 20 gallons per 100 sq. ft. per year.

A yard of compost is about 200 gallons and is enough for 270 sq. ft. for the initial double-digging phase. For subsequent applications, a yard will do about 1,000 square feet.

Do not add excessive amounts of compost to your garden. Do not build a garden bed with compost and vermiculite, or sand only. Unfortunately, I have seen gardens where this has been done. Nitrogen levels are too high and the plants are highly vegetative, but yield little. In

Organic Gardening continued. . .

addition. those high nitrate plants attract insects, and the fruit produced is bound to be high in nitrates (not good). Excess compost can also bring the P and K to excessive levels. If that happens, back off on the compost and be sure the other nutrients are at the proper amounts and ratios. I use the Arkansas soil tests reports to look at pounds of nutrients per acre available, but depend on other sources for making organic recommendations.

Increased organic matter in the soil also improves the soil tilth (soil structure), and makes for a lighter, fluffier, and easy-to-work soil that we all desire. Perhaps the most noticeable characteristic of increased organic matter is the increased

ability of the soil to hold water. The following table demonstrates just how important the organic matter is for holding water. "Humus" is the organic matter that has been digested by microbes.

The other important values of organic matter include its ability to provide nutrients and buffer the soil against pH changes. The organic matter also serves to hold nutrients in the soil. This is especially important in sandy soils. High organic soils are generally darker in color and can warm up faster in the spring. High organic matter soils have higher biological activity, which helps to keep the plants healthy.

It is wise to get a soil organic matter content analysis to check the effectiveness of your soil-building activities. This organic matter test is

done separately, so take an extra pint of soil when you get your other soil test done by the Extension Service. The regular soil test is free, but the organic matter test now costs \$6.

Building the soil organic matter content requires a long-term commitment. Expect major improvement over the first few years, and then generally a slower process for the next 5–10 years. Remember to get soil tests and add minerals to the soil, where needed, at the same time you are adding the organic matter. It all works together, and eventually, you reach a healthy, well-balanced soil that gives you tasty, nutrient-dense produce.



"Increased organic matter in the soil also improves the soil tilth (soil structure)."

Table 1 -- APPROXIMATE WATER HOLDING CAPACITY OF HUMUS

(Note: 1 inch of water yields 28,000 gallons/acre or 643 gallons for 1,000 square feet.)

HUMUS LEVEL percent	SOIL DEPTH inches	WATER HOLDING CAPACITY inches of rain
1	7	.36
2	7	.72
5	7	1.80
5	21	7.40

**April Home Garden
Planting Guide**

**Basil
Asparagus
Cucumbers
Sweet Potatoes
Squash
Melons
Okra
Peppers
Eggplant
Sweet Corn
Dill
Tomatoes
Beans (Snap & Pole)
Kohlrabi, Broccoli
Cabbage, Collards
Swiss Chard
Lettuce, Radish, Beets**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS REGARDING
ANY OF THE INFORMATION CONTAINED WITHIN THIS
NEWSLETTER, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT ME AT
870.423.2958.**

SINCERELY YOURS,

**LEON DUNCAN
COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT-STAFF CHAIR**

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