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## Come Grow With Us

The Come Grow With registration form is available. There are more than twenty programs to choose, include propagation, wild flowers, perennials, vegetable gardening, and much more. Due to space constraints, registrants will be asked to rank their preferred classes, so **be sure to register early** to get your choicest selections.

**Volunteer opportunities** abound. Contact Celia Knapp or Diamond Geiger if you are interested. The more the work is spread around, the easier it is for all.

## Next Meeting . . .



**March 11, 2010**  
**6:30 p.m. at the Extension**  
**Office.**

## Sharpen your shears

March is one of the best months to perform major pruning of your shrubs and fruit trees. While performing this first garden task of the year rejuvenates our souls, it is also very beneficial to many plants. Thinning branches and removed dead or diseased limbs will improve the plant's air circulation, growth, and overall shape.

March is also a good time to spray your dormant fruit trees, transplant shrubs, and grab a few scions for grafting.

## Backyard Gardens Program

Ag Week 2010 is soon upon us. One of the evening programs that might interest Master Gardeners is the **Backyard Gardens**. This program will be held on **Tuesday, March 16, 2010**, from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. at the Extension office in Youngsville.

Program topics are:

- *Home Herb and Vegetable Garden Disease and Pest Management* by Ruth Benner
- *Wildflowers – Hidden Gems in our Backyards* by Chris Mosebach
- *Butterfly Gardens* by Josie Gerardi.

The cost is \$5.00 and pre-registration is strongly encouraged. Contact the Cooperative Extension to register or to receive more information.



**What do you get if you cross a four leaf clover with poison ivy?**  
**A rash of good luck.**



## Wildlife and the Plants They Love to Hate

Penn State is offering a special webinar series on wildlife and the plants they love to hate. These webinars occur the first Monday of every month at 12:00 p.m. with a replay at 7:00 p.m. Each webinar lasts approximately one hour. You do not need special software. Each session is recorded, so if you have to miss one, you can watch it later at your convenience.

- **March 1, 2010 – Guess Who is Coming to Dinner.** Learn who is cohabitating in your yard and how to evict him.
- **April 5, 2010 - Deer Resistant Plants.** There is hope for your garden. Find out how to coexist with the deer.
- **May 3, 2010 – Native Plants.** Learn to recreate part of your natural landscape with the showiest of our native perennials.
- **June 7, 2010 – Rabbit Resistant Plants.** Learn how to choose plants that will prompt your furry friends to dine at the neighbor's house.

To register and take part in the live seminars, visit <http://rmrext.cas.psu.edu/PAForestWeb/>. This event is sponsored by the **PA Forests Web Seminar Center**.

## News of the Weird: Tipsy Flowers Don't Tip Over by Christine Kuntz



The odor emanating from your paperwhites (*Narcissus tazetta*) might not be the only thing that is intoxicating; your paperwhites might be a little looped, themselves. According to Professor William Miller of Cornell's Flower Bulb Research Program, a dilute alcohol solution will stunt the growth of paperwhites, but will not affect flower size, fragrance, or bloom duration. The ideal solution is 4% - 6% alcohol, with solutions greater than 10% proving toxic. After testing various alcoholic beverages, Professor Miller recommends using hard alcohol, such as vodka, rum, or whiskey, and refraining from wine and beer, which have too much sugar. So how does alcohol control plant

height? Professor Miller surmises that the alcohol disrupts water absorption, thereby slightly dehydrating the plant.

**Reference:** <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/March06/drunk.flowers.ssl.html>



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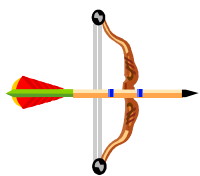
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The Guinness World Record for the clover with the most lobes belongs to Shigeo Obara of Japan, who in 2002 discovered a clover with 18 leaves.



## Grow Your Own Arrow Poison with a Desert Rose By Dan Sorensen



So you have some pests in the garden? Maybe a mouse, or voles are chewing the bark of your apple trees, or perhaps some starlings are eating the corn seeds as fast as you can plant them. Perhaps a woodchuck has discovered the succulent bounty of fresh lettuce or broccoli you have slaved over. You need to get rid of these pests quickly and quietly. You live in town or within a safety zone, so guns are out of the question. Poison bait is dangerous to the nice little neighborhood kitties with their cute little night time songs and the precious boy puppy dogs that come to visit your poodle Fifi a couple of times a year. You are seeking something quiet and quick to eliminate the pests without disturbing the rest of the neighborhood.

You read an article in National Geographic about South American Indians who use blow darts to hunt. That sounds like a good idea. You remember that they used poison from the skin of tree frogs that live in the rain forest to make sure the prey dies quickly and humanely. The darts sound good, but there is a definite shortage of poison frogs in Pennsylvania. The only tree frog we have here is the Spring Peeper and they aren't poisonous. Then you remember that other article in National Geographic (What a great gardener's resource!) about the East African tribes that make poison from plants that grow all across the dry savannas and sub-Sahel regions to hunt baboons and other meat sources smaller than elephants. The one most widely used is one called the Desert Rose, *Adenium obesum*. In its native habitat it will grow up to 15 feet tall.

The African tribes use the Desert Rose as a dart poison by boiling the plant's fleshy stem and leaves to extract the active ingredients. They mix the syrupy solution with other plant extracts and with a bit of the concoction applied to your darts and after a little target practice you have all you need to quietly eliminate the sources of your garden woes.



The desert rose is not only an excellent poison source (keep away from children and pets), but it is an attractive and easily grown houseplant with an interesting fat trunk that produces beautiful red, pink, or white trumpet shaped blossoms two or three times a year. In Pennsylvania it can spend the summers outdoors in the sunniest location you can find. They can be treated much like desert cactus or jade plants, but do prefer warm conditions, so try to keep them from temperatures below 60 degrees. It is not unusual for most or all of their leaves to drop during the dormant season between blossom times. During those periods keep the soil





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dry to avoid rot, though if the trunk starts to shrivel, give them a light watering and some spray mist if possible. They can be kept in a shady location while dormant, but while actively growing they will be best kept in as much sun as possible. Too much shade then will produce weak spindly growth and may inhibit blooming. Also during the growth period they may be kept moist, and watered every day, avoiding standing water at all times. It is better to err on the dry side as *A. obesum* is highly susceptible to root rot.

Soil can be a standard potting soil, but with the addition of 1/3 to 1/2 Perlite, sand or small gravel to improve drainage. Fertilization is beneficial during the growing season. Apply a balanced fertilizer at half the recommended rate every three or four weeks. Do not fertilize when no growth is occurring.

Pests that are most likely to present a problem to the Desert Rose are spider mites, mealy bugs and scale. Use any household insecticide to control the pests. If the leaves drop, they will grow back after the pests are gone.

Once fairly rare in the United States, the desert rose is rapidly becoming more common, especially in the warmer states. I found my first specimen shivering among a collection of flowering perennials at our local K-Mart one cool spring day several years ago. There was no name or barcode on the pot, but I convinced the sales people to let me have it for \$5.00. It continues to grow and bloom for me every summer.

**Important!** Use great care when handling and/or pruning, because **all Adeniums have highly toxic sap**. Do not get sap in your eyes. If you get sap on your skin, wash promptly with soapy water and rinse. Sap from Adeniums has been known to cause skin irritation if not promptly washed off. I have grown these plants safely for many years without problems; however, precautions are prudent.



## Monitoring the Pulse of Nature By Christine Kuntz

Phenology – the study of recurring plant and animal life cycle stages – is an important ecological measurement. Unlike the wristwatch or calendar that rarely wavers in its constancy, the phenological timekeeper fluctuates with nature’s moods. By monitoring a species’ phenology we can monitor climate changes which in turn help us to forecast the introduction or spread of pests, tweak our crop selection, and observe shifts in plant and animal populations.

Phenology is nature’s calendar and it enables us to forecast when to plant our crops, take our allergy medicine, and view peak coloration of autumn’s splendor. As Master Gardeners we routinely track certain phenological traits – either captured in detailed garden journals or committed to memory. For example, colt’s foot and marsh marigold herald the springtime, while the blooms of the rose of Sharon and field asters hint of autumn.

The USA National Phenology Network gathers data from citizens and scientists to monitor the impact of climate change on plants and animals. You can volunteer to observe one or more of the 200 species that make up this nationwide biological monitoring project. If you are interested in participating in this project, visit [www.usanpn.org](http://www.usanpn.org). This project supports the global warming theory of climate change. If this is not your cup of tea, a quick internet search will unveil other organizations’ phenology projects.



## Horticultural Word of The Month By Dan Sorensen

**CAUDICIFORM**- A caudiciform is a plant with a swollen, thickened stem, or caudex, which stores water and food for the plant for use during drought. Sometimes the swollen caudex is below the soil surface but potted plants are grown with part or all of the caudex above the soil line to display its unique character. These plants are sometimes called “fat plants” and are represented by thousands of species across hundreds of genera. Most are grown for their unique stems, but many such as the desert rose, produce beautiful flower displays as well. Some of the better-known representatives are the baobab tree, sea onion, Amaryllis, Amorphophallus, Pony Tail Palm, ant plants, and certain morning glories. For more information visit <http://www.bihrmann.com/caudiciforms/>. Be careful, collecting caudiciforms can become intoxicating.

## Clover is a Versatile and Beneficial Plant. By Christine Kuntz

Since it is March, we would be remiss if we did not comment on the shamrock. If Saint Patrick did demonstrate the Holy Trinity using a clover-like plant, he most likely used a member of the *Trifolium* genus, such as *Trifolium repens* (white clover) and not the *Oxalis regnellii* that is commonly sold around March 17<sup>th</sup>.



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The clover is oft the bane of homeowner's monoculture turfs, this lowly plant deserves more respect.

- *Trifolium* is a great green manure. Although its adaptability causes some to curse it as a weed, many organic gardeners are embracing small doses of clover because it adds nitrogen to the soil.
- *Trifolium* is a tasty and nutritious forage that can tolerate close grazing. This lowly, oft-disparaged plant plays an important role in our nation's food supply, serving as an important fodder for cattle.
- *Trifolium* is an effective plant for erosion control. It also makes an excellent ground cover for those gardeners who are tired of vinca, sedum, and pachysandra. (Check out *Trifolium repens Atropurpureum* (Bronze Dutch Clover) for a colorful and impressive ground cover.
- *Trifolium* is a significant food source for pollinators, including honey bees.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. While you still may not be keen on clover in your yard or garden, perhaps the next time you are weeding, you will take a closer look at this versatile plant and pause a moment to reflect on its good qualities.

For those who enjoy conspiracy theories, there is a theory buzzing around the internet that when the makers of certain weed killers discovered that clover was an incident victim of weed herbicide, the company began a fierce campaign to promote clover as a weed.

#### References:

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<http://www.arhomeandgarden.org/plantoftheweek/articles/shamrock.htm>

<http://www.ugaextension.com/cobb/anr/Documents/shamrock.pdf>

<http://okeechobee.ifas.ufl.edu/News%20columns/Shamrocks.htm>

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