

The Seedling

Newsletter of the Northwest Louisiana Master Gardeners Association

An Affiliate of LSU Ag Center

www.nwlamg.org

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MG ACTIVITIES

LE TOUR – MAY 2 SCHEDULE

The Hospitality and Ticket committees for Le Tour des Jardins ask that Master Gardeners note this schedule for the day before tour weekend, Friday, May 2:

9 a.m. – 2 p.m. All gardens on Le Tour will be open to Master Gardeners who are working on the weekend. They should bring their tickets.

Noon – 4 p.m. Bring unsold tickets and ticket money to the Carriage House (if you have not done so earlier).

Noon – 4 p.m. Bring cookie donations to the Carriage House.

Noon – 4 p.m. Head garden guides may pick up garden equipment, gate money and tickets.

5 – 6 p.m. Master Gardeners who are working Saturday and Sunday may visit the vendors at the Pioneer Heritage Center, LSUS campus. Please do not come earlier as they will be setting up.

GUIDELINES FOR GARDEN GUIDES

Garden guides should abide by these rules:

1. Dress code: white shirt or MG denim shirt with denim jeans (or navy skirt or pants), or white shirt or MG denim shirt with khaki pants (**no shorts, please**). All guides will wear their green aprons and name tags.
2. All guides arrive at the garden an hour before Le Tour begins and stay an hour late if needed.
3. Arrangements for use of restroom facilities will be made for MG volunteers and for possible emergency use only by guests.
4. It is most important that guides visit with the guests who have paid to see the gardens. Guides are in the gardens to educate the public. They should not stand in groups of three or four visiting. Guides should welcome the guests, point out the garden's features and answer questions. If guests ask about the MG organization or about nominating a garden, briefly answer and direct them to the Pioneer Heritage Center. There they will find a MG table with all of the information, applications and handouts. Also, please encourage guests to visit the Pioneer Heritage Center at LSUS to see the vendors.

5. Each garden guide should be assigned to a particular section of the garden and should become familiar with the plants in that section during the work day before Le Tour. The purpose is to enhance the guides' knowledge about unique specimens and teaching ability for Le Tour.
6. **This is a non-smoking public event!** Smoking by guides and the public is prohibited in the garden. If garden guides or guests must smoke, they must leave the homeowner's property and stand no less than 40 yards from the garden entrance. If guides or guests smoke in the garden, they will be asked to stop. If they refuse or ignore the request, they will be escorted off the property.
7. If a garden guide must have a cell phone, it should be set to vibrate instead of ring. All personal calls should be taken and placed outside the garden. The head garden guides will carry cell phones to communicate with runners and for emergency uses.
8. Garden guides who will not be able to fulfill their obligations as scheduled should notify the volunteer coordinator, Evelyn Thomas, 929-3485, as soon as possible so a replacement can be found. It would be helpful to notify the head garden guide as well. Simply not showing up is not acceptable.
9. There must be no cursing, foul language or inappropriate topics of conversation in the gardens. Guides represent the entire organization.
10. Please consume snacks out of sight of the guests. Water will be provided for the guides, and they may drink it in the garden. We will not sell water to the guests this year. Direct the guests to the Lipscomb garden for hospitality. Ticket-takers at the Lipscomb garden should welcome all guests and offer the refreshments.
11. Each garden guide and head garden guide is expected to purchase a ticket for Le Tour. It is an annual contribution to the organization. All garden guides may use their tickets to attend the open house the Friday before Le Tour from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.. Children under 12 are permitted to visit the gardens for free when escorted by an adult. Children 12 or older must have a ticket.
12. Neither guests nor Master Gardeners may take pets into the gardens.
13. **Ticket takers are to clearly and boldly mark each ticket as the guest enters the garden.** Ticket takers do not decide when it is or is not important to do this task. It is a standard request for all gardens, regardless of the time or day.
14. Garden guides are asked to park away from the homes so that guests may park closer.
15. At the end of Sunday's session, guides should make sure nothing is left behind (tables, trash, water, ice chests signs, money, tablecloths).



Thanks to all!

- **Alycia Bellah**, Le Tour chairman

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Late in March a few of us got together and reorganized the Carriage House space. It turned out to be quite a spring cleaning. The last 12 months had been a whirlwind of activity, and it was time to regroup. We are 90 percent finished with finding a place for everything and putting everything in its place. So now we must turn to a way to keep it that way. We

have come up with some rules that if observed will keep us organized. A lot of folks are using the Carriage House for a lot of projects, and these procedures should help us all to get the maximum use of our spaces with the minimum of work. If everyone just does a little, no one will have to do a lot. Read on.

Carriage House Rules

1. Clean tools and equipment after use and before putting them away.
2. Books may be removed from the CH. Sign them out using the form in the borrowing box on the front desk.
3. Equipment for computer presentations may be borrowed from the CH for your MG projects. It is locked in a cabinet in the upstairs resource room. The portable screen is in Denyse Cummins' closet. Please contact her for admittance. To reserve the equipment, complete the reservation form in the resource room.
4. When committees use storage or equipment at the CH, it is the responsibility of the committee chair to put items away properly.
5. Before bringing new items into the CH, check with Denyse as to where they will be stored.
6. Food items need to be stored in the refrigerator in the workroom.
7. Phone duty at the CH carries these responsibilities in addition to answering hot line calls:
 - Water the plants if they are dry.
 - Sweep the floor of the reception room, the adjoining workroom and the bathroom.
 - Dust the front desk.
 - Empty the reception, workroom and bathroom trash cans. Key to the outside trash can enclosure is in the top desk drawer.
8. When you bring pots to donate, put them in the storeroom in the designated place.
9. The folding chairs in the storage room belong to the RTM Center. Do not block access to them.
10. There is no space to store mulching materials. Please bring them to the CH only when a project requests them.
11. There is no space for more decorative items. Please do not bring anything else.
12. The table to the left of the front door is the dropoff table. Master Gardeners can use this table to drop off items for pickup.
13. Use the dropoff table, not the front desk or the sofas, for items you need to circulate to other Master Gardeners.
14. If you use the CH for a project or for storage, please clean up the area when you leave. Remember, your mother will not be coming in today, so leave it the way you found it. The broom closet in the storage room has a broom, mop and cleaning materials.

Thank you, Master Gardeners, for observing these rules. We all want our headquarters to be a pleasant place to do our work. With your help it will be.

- **Judy Roemer**

GREEN THINGS

A LITTLE ABOUT MULCH

Summer is just around the corner, and now is the time to get ready for summer heat. Mulching is the best solution to keeping plant roots cool and conserving moisture. The biggest mistake in mulching most gardeners make is that they cram the mulch too close to the roots of the plants, thus causing crown rot. Additionally, if they use too much mulch, air cannot circulate and fungus will gather.

Many mulch products are available, but the easiest way to mulch (and the cheapest) is pine straw. Pine straw or any other mulch should be removed when the leaves start to fall and air is cooler. Store your mulch in a dry area (for reuse again next summer).

When you are going to mulch, it is important to remember to plant your plants a little higher than the soil level of the original container. Doing this will help ensure that the mulch will not cause crown rot if inadvertently located too close to the roots. Finally, never plant any plants, shrubs or trees lower than the level of the soil in the original container.

- **Aysen Gillespie**

SUMMER SHRUB PRUNING

Most spring and early summer flowering shrubs break our usual rules for pruning. Trees are pruned in the winter, so that when they start growing in the spring, they can get off to a bang-up start. If spring bloomers are pruned in the winter, the gardener will end up cutting off the flower buds of many shrubs.

Azalea flower buds are visible at the tips of the branches, but forsythia, hydrangea and gardenia buds are sleeping invisibly inside the branches and flowers will end up in the compost pile instead of the shrub border if pruned in the winter. The best insurance is to prune the early bloomers right after they finish flowering.

Let's start with azaleas. The glory of the Southern spring season (and our trademark to most of the world), azaleas can bloom from March through April. Some can rebloom in early winter, and newer varieties can produce lightly all year long. That long season of bloom can make things even more confusing, but if you prune right after the last flush of flowers fades, you can't go wrong.

Try to finish up by July 4 for the traditional varieties. They will begin to make next spring's flower buds beginning this fall. Go out and look for the buds, and you can even get an idea of how good the show will be next year.

If you are going to do something drastic, like bringing the height down on a really tall, older bush, start early to give the shrub plenty of cool days to recover from the shock. For extra insurance, cut down only one third of the bush every year until the job is finished. Be very cautious pruning native, deciduous azaleas. They seem to take pruning as a personal insult and will sometimes pay you back by dying from the shock.

Gardenias tend to get tall and leggy as they age. Wait until the wonderful perfumed flowers finish in June before cutting them down to knee high. They will respond very well, especially if you also toss out a few handfuls of granular fertilizer at the base of the bush after you finish pruning.

If the color of the leaves is pale, dissolve a handful of Epsom salts in water and pour it over the root system. Epsom salts is composed of magnesium, which helps green up leaves, and sulfur, which acidifies the soil for these acid-lovers. Water well to dissolve the fertilizer, and then water regularly, and you'll be rewarded with a more compact, bushier, greener flowering shrub for the next bloom season.

Lack of flowering in hydrangeas is a common complaint. “They were gorgeous in my grandma’s yard; what am I doing wrong”? If plants are getting enough water to keep them from wilting during the summer, they are probably lacking flowers because they are being pruned too close to bloom time. The dried flowers remain on the bush for so long that it’s sometimes hard to tell when blooming is over.

Prune when the blooms stop looking fresh and begin to look papery. Prune out any overly long shoots that ruin the overall shape, but also remove all of the weak, thin shoots from the center. Thin shoots rarely bloom and if they do, they produce small, inferior flowers. Prune them all the way to the ground, leaving only nice fat shoots.

Everything does not need to be pruned every year. Pruning is often more satisfying to the gardener than beneficial to the plant. Hopefully, we’ll do such a good job shaping our shrubs this year that we won’t have any work to do when we walk outside with the pruning shears next year. Resist making those casual snips and be proud of the job you’ve already done.

- **Denyse Cummins**

DOWNY MILDEWS

The downy mildews are currently a major problem for the ornamental and vegetable industries alike. These are a group of diseases caused by Oomycetes (the “water molds”) that occur on a wide range of ornamental plants, including bedding plants (such as snapdragons, impatiens, salvia and coleus) and floriculture crops. Each of the downy mildew pathogens, which include species of *Peronospora*, *Bremia* and *Plasmospora*, tends to be restricted to closely related plants within a specific plant family. Because they are obligate parasites, they must have a living plant host in order to grow and reproduce. However, they can survive in soil or plant debris for several years in the absence of a susceptible host.

Symptoms of these diseases include chlorotic and necrotic spots that are visible on the upper surface of the leaves. When viewed from beneath, these lesions may be angular in appearance when they are delimited by the leaf veins. As implied by the name, a sign of the disease is the “downy” white to gray to purple growth of the pathogen on the underside of the leaves as it reproduces. Infected leaves often fall from the plant. The pathogen may also develop systemically within infected plants, causing stunting and leaf distortion.

The current combination of mild days and cool nights is ideal for the development of most downy mildews, particularly during periods of rain, as these pathogens need free water on the plant in order to cause infection. They also need a relative humidity above 85 percent in order to reproduce. Because they sporulate so prolifically and develop so quickly under these conditions, these diseases can be extremely difficult to control, especially on susceptible cultivars. It is extremely important that susceptible crops be monitored on a regular basis so that action can be taken at the first sign of disease and thereby prevent these diseases from getting out of hand.

Because they are not true fungi (remember they are “water molds” like *Phytophthora* and *Pythium*), many of the fungicides commonly used for disease control in the ornamental industry are not effective against them. Of the fungicides currently available, Aliette, Stature, and Heritage all provide excellent control of downy mildews when used preventatively. Mancozeb-based products also give very good control, as do copper-based fungicides, but the copper fungicides can be phytotoxic to some plants. The evaluation of fungicides for downy mildew control was recently given a high priority for funding for the next two years at the Ornamental Horticulture Workshop of the IR-4 Project. Several promising fungicides are currently being evaluated, and cyazofamid, which does an excellent job of controlling downy mildew on cucurbits, was recently registered for use on ornamentals under the trade name Segway.

- **Don Ferrin**, from Allan Souvestre’s email

ASPARAGUS FERNS

The name “asparagus fern” is a strange mix of terms, as these plants are neither ferns nor edible vegetables. Although not even distantly related to ferns, asparagus ferns are closely related to asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*). Asparagus ferns are versatile, reliable, easy to grow and useful in a variety of gardening situations.

The most commonly grown asparagus fern is *Asparagus densiflorus* ‘Sprengeri.’ This plant produces a mound of shiny, bright green, finely textured foliage about 18 to 24 inches tall and somewhat wider. (Although I use the term “foliage,” asparagus ferns do not possess true leaves. What appear to be small, needle-like leaves are actually modified, flattened stems called cladodes.)

Showing its relationship to asparagus, the new growth looks remarkable like tiny spears of that vegetable. When the new growth opens and matures, its lacy appearance reminds people of ferns; thus, the common name does make sense. When the plants are old enough, tiny white flowers appear among the foliage. The resulting fruits are about the size of peas, start off green and then turn an attractive red.

Asparagus ferns are fairly easy to grow from seed. Remove the large, tan seed from the ripe, red fruit and plant it immediately. It is common to see seedling asparagus ferns growing in a landscape with mature, fruiting plants. Because they deal so well with poor conditions, asparagus ferns will often grow where few other plants will, and therefore are a sure bet even for novice gardeners.

Adaptable asparagus ferns will grow in full sun to shade. However, their foliage tends to look somewhat yellow in full sun. Their growth and color tend to be better if they receive shade for part of the day.

Because they tolerate more sun than true ferns, asparagus ferns are good choices where the fine texture of ferns is desired in sunny locations. They will grow in nearly any soil and will thrive in both moist and dry conditions. They flourish in the hottest summer heat. Temperatures in the mid to low 20s may freeze the foliage on occasion, but a trimming in the spring and abundant new growth will get the plants looking just fine again in no time.

They are among the most drought-tolerant plants we use in containers, which is a real advantage, since containers can dry out so quickly. When planted in the landscape, their drought-tolerance also lowers the need for supplemental irrigation during summer heat. Their secret lies in the white tuberous structure attached in their roots, which store water to carry the plant through drought. You may see them when transplanting or repotting the plants. They are normal and healthy and generally should not be removed.

There isn't a single major insect or disease that attacks asparagus ferns, so you never have to spray them. Fertilize them in spring and summer when you fertilize other plants in your landscape, and they will produce abundant, deep-green growth.

The fine-textured, bright green foliage and low mounding growth habit of ‘Sprengeri’ make it a good landscape choice. It is excellent as a ground cover, as a specimen or planted in groups.

It is an outstanding plant for hanging baskets and containers, with its long stems that hang so gracefully. Asparagus ferns grow well indoors, too. Place your plant by a brightly lit window – morning sun would be ideal. Keep the plant evenly moist and give it a liquid fertilizer in summer. I find that asparagus ferns are generally easier to care for indoors than true ferns.

The ‘Sprengeri’ asparagus fern needs to be repotted only when the roots are cramped to the point of raising the soil level an inch or so above the pot rim. At this point, the rootball will look like a solid mass of tough roots. And they are tough.

Either repot your asparagus fern into a larger container or divide it and plant it into two or more containers.

To divide the clump, use a saw – yes, a saw -- to cut the clump into two or more pieces. Don't worry about severing the water storage structures in the roots. Use any well-drained potting soil to repot.

Another asparagus fern you are likely to see is *Asparagus densiflorus* ‘Meyers.’ It is also called asparagus fern, but a more common name is foxtail fern. It is a very different looking plant and has a more formal appearance. The tiny foliage is arranged densely along individual semi-erect stems that look remarkably like green fox tails. Taken together, the effect is like a spiky hairdo.

This plant is sometimes harder to find and may be more expensive than ‘Sprengeri,’ but it is well worth looking for. I also find the foxtail fern somewhat slower-growing than the ‘Sprengeri,’ but it is just as tough and reliable. The foxtail fern's growth habit is very dramatic and unusual, and it looks particularly great in a container.

Finally, you may occasionally see *Asparagus myriocladus*. As a seedling, it resembles a small, delicate pine tree. It eventually grows into 4- to 5-foot arching spikes with dark green, very fine foliage and is commonly called the Ming fern.

There are other members of this delightful group of plants for you to explore. So, the next time you think about asparagus, you just might consider something for your landscape rather than for your plate.

- **Dan Gill**, the *Times-Picayune*, Jan. 26, 2008 (Editor's note: this article was spotted and sent by **Betty Lawrence**. Asparagus ferns are available at nurseries in Shreveport and Bossier City.)



ASPARAGUS FERN