

Newsletter



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Gather No Moss?

Why using peat puts plant and insect biodiversity at risk

Canada is the world's leading producer of peat used for horticultural activities. Yet, according to the UK Environmental Agency, the extraction of peat for garden use is causing "irreversible damage" to important ecosystems that took many thousands of years to form. The European Union has enacted strong legislation to encourage the phasing out of peat use.

With peat's 1 mm yearly growth rate, peatlands do not regenerate after harvesting. Even with reclamation efforts, the unique conditions that support a broad range of plants and animals cannot be re-established. The Nature Conservancy of Canada reports that loss of peatlands not only results in the loss of important biodiversity and puts plant, insect, and animal species at risk, it also exacerbates global warming by removing a much-needed source of land-based carbon.

Although many wetland scientists contend that significant environmental damage is being done by peat harvesting, the Canadian Peat Moss Association, which represents the peat industry's largest producers, contends that peatlands can be re-established after harvesting. Line Richard, chair of a 2003 federal government committee investigating peatland reclamation, states otherwise: "Following a disturbance,

natural plant recolonization of peat bogs is extremely slow and, if it occurs at all, the species that become established are often birch or shrubs." A reclaimed peatland bears little resemblance to a natural one.

On the one hand, peat is currently harvested in Canada from about 16,000 hectares of peatlands, representing a small percentage of total Canadian peatlands. On the other hand, 1.2 million metric tonnes of horticultural peat, with a value of \$165 million, are harvested annually in Canada—peat harvesting is clearly a sizable industry, and there is considerable pressure (for example, from the Nova Scotia government) to expand peat harvesting.

It is always difficult to weigh economic needs against environmental needs. Nonetheless, as there is clear evidence that harvesting depletes what is for all practical purposes a (near) non-renewable resource, and causes irreversible damage to important ecosystems, it is important for gardeners to ask themselves if we should continue to use peat when ecologically friendly alternatives are readily available.

If you are interested in reading about alternatives to peat, the Royal Horticultural Society (www.rhs.org.uk) has produced a policy on peat alternatives; their

website includes a number of useful articles, including "Peat and the Gardener." As well, the Nature Conservancy of Canada website (www.natureconservancy.ca) offers articles on the ecological importance and worldwide destruction of peatlands.

—Jane Sherrott

Choose peat alternatives

Gardeners can choose ecologically friendly, peat-free alternatives, made from natural, quickly renewable materials. Many excellent soil improvers are made from such waste materials as manures, biosolids, green and wood wastes, and agricultural and fishing industry waste. All offer the additional advantages of being locally produced and diverting materials from landfills. Spent coffee grounds can be used as an alternate soil acidifier. Coir-based products, composted green waste and ground bark products have been found in RHS growth trials to work just as well as peat-based products for propagation.

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Letter from the Chair

It is hard today to believe that summer nearly will be over when you read this letter. I hope that everyone will have had a good summer whether they were travelling, working, or spending time in their garden.

September brings new beginnings as classes and meetings start again. Clinics are almost finished and a few of us will be scrambling to collect our volunteer hours. After a summer of garden enjoyment we also start planning the changes we want to make in our garden for spring.

The weather this summer has brought a few extremes, from hot sun to cool rainy days. It makes me think about the extremes that happen in volunteer activity in our organizations. We have hard-working committee members who work tirelessly all year and who deserve our gratitude, for they help the organization keep going. We also have people who rise to the occasion when special events occur and who also deserve our thanks—these events are what make membership fun. My question is: Why does it seem to be a lot of the same people doing both? Can we do something to help even out the temperature and get more people involved? Ideas are put forward that people seem to agree “are a good idea,” but when it comes to getting involved and making the ideas flourish it becomes a “cool rainy day.”

I hope that after a summer off to rejuvenate ourselves and with new September beginnings that we will all be ready to tackle new projects. Those who want to help will always find room on our committees—for the annual update, education, coffee, website, welcoming, writers. Your help is needed. Look at the list of committees on page 10 of the newsletter and contact the committee chair to offer your help.

As always you can contact me with your ideas and concerns.

—Lynne Christmas, Chair
NTL234@telus.net



The good weather this summer finally arrived when most of our clinics were done. I feel badly for our nursery owner hosts this year with all of the rain and cold weather as there are still a lot of annuals on the shelves of most of the nurseries I frequent.

Judging from the number of phone calls the Area Coordinators and I have had in the past couple of months, clinics have gone smoothly for the most part. I have certainly enjoyed the contacts that I have had. It is so easy to do this coordinating when everyone is willing to make accommodations for the differences in our skills, abilities, tolerances, and demands on our time. We are such a diverse group and the willingness to share knowledge and time with each other and the public is the common ground where we meet.

Plans are underway to take a hard look at the clinic structure in the fall. Several clinic spots went unfilled, once again making it difficult for students to get their 35 hours for their first year and causing disappointment for the nursery owners. Several questions that come to my mind when I think about how we provide service to the public: I wonder if we should be doing garden tours. Do they meet our mandate? Many of our outlying clinics go unattended. Should we keep offering them? We do not have an Area Coordinator for Bowen Island. Should we drop those clinics? How can we make it easier for students to get their hours?

I would really appreciate it if you would send an email to me mgsecretary@gmail.com if you have an opinion or suggestions about how we could improve our service to the public. I want to thank you all for making my first year as Coordinator such a pleasant one. I really have enjoyed it.

—Diane Hartley
Overall Clinic Coordinator

Education Committee Hard at Work

Committee to evaluate Basic Training program and continuing education priorities

Since its inception in the Fall of 2005, the Master Gardener Education Committee has been working through its Terms of Reference, focusing on two main priorities:

- (1) developing and implementing continuing education opportunities for MGs, and
- (2) developing a program evaluation model to evaluate the Basic Training program curriculum.



Meetings have focused on terms of reference, planning education events, and priorities for 2006–2007. Here is a brief overview of what the committee did in 2006 as well as our priorities for 2007.

Terms of reference and membership

The committee will support the goals of the Master Gardeners Association of BC by:

- (1) assessing members' needs through reviewing the results of the January 2005 Education Needs Survey
- (2) reviewing and making recommendations based on the survey results
- (3) continuing to assess members' educational needs on a consistent basis
- (4) developing a model for evaluating the Basic Training and Advanced Training programs
- (5) overseeing the evaluation of the Basic Training and Advanced Training programs.

Members of the committee are: Jack Grant (chair), Lynne Christmas, Dale Fitzpatrick, Ann Kent, Robin Rance, and Margaret Walwyn.

Continuing education

Our review of the Education Needs Survey clearly showed that the membership wanted to have more access to continuing education opportunities that are highly focused in content, compact in time, and portable to various loca-

tions. Survey respondents also stressed the need for the association to continuously check with members about their educational needs. As well, respondents wanted more personal contact at meetings, and more opportunities to hear talks given by other MGs.

In response to this feedback, the Education Committee conducted small-group sessions (six groups—about 16 people per group) during the regular January 2006 MGABC meeting to get more information from

members about continuing activities and topics that they wanted us to offer in 2006. The groups were given the top 10 workshop topics identified in the Education Needs Survey and asked to discuss and prioritize their workshop choices. Based on the feedback from the groups, we set up and offered the following education activities for 2006:

May – full-day workshop on Diagnosing Insect Problems with Linda Gilkeson and Plant Disease Diagnosing with Andrea Buonassissi (40 participants)

June – guided tour of Dart's Hill and Joan Bentley's garden (25 participants)

September – Organic Gardening seminar at City Farmer, Vancouver (25 participants)

October – guided gardening tour of Everett Crowley Park, Vancouver (10 participants)

Thank you to everyone who participated in the small-group sessions. Your input helped to ensure that we could offer workshops and tours that would appeal to our membership. Thank you also to those of you who offered to help organize, support, or lead workshops or tours.

In early 2007, in response to survey respondents' requests to hear more talks given by MGs, we invited submissions from MGs interested in giving brief talks on the topic of "Winter Woes," designed to focus on the kinds

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Over the Garden Fence

Master Gardeners share a bit of practical advice

Gardeners are a social bunch. We love to get together to talk about gardening. And we often learn the most valuable practices from gardeners who share their knowledge. A number of experienced MGs kindly passed along information on the MG Opinions email discussion forum when I asked them to share garden practices they have found to be helpful.

Many thanks to Joan Bentley, Betty MacPhee, Jo-Ann Canning, Helen Brown, Miriam Brownlow, Selina Pope, and Kristin Crouch for offering their tips; it is wonderful to be able to pass these along to MGs. And a special thank-you to Joan Bentley, who let me pester her for her gardening discoveries; from looking at her glorious garden we knew she had to have lots of tricks.

From office to garden

I always have a supply of the larger size paper clips in my gardening tool bag to hold plant stems close to the ground to encourage off-shoot rooting. To train a low growing plant to move in a certain direction, I just bend the paper clip into a U-shape and use it to anchor shoots into the ground. It works like charm. (Selina)

Great idea for a large garden

In the far corner of your garden place a decoratively painted mailbox on a post, and in it keep pruners, gloves, string, notebook, pencil, and plant markers. (Joan)

2 ways to help you remember plant names

Write plant names on the bottom of plant tags (the part that goes into the soil) with indelible ink; this way the writing never bleaches out with the sunlight. Also, you can bury the tag so it's less noticeable in the garden. (Selina)

If you don't want plant labels to be seen (but like me you have trouble remembering names), stick the label part way in the ground and use a rock to cover it. (Joan)

Saving time in the garden

Here's a great timesaving practice. When weeding, keep the container for trimmings beside you and dispose of the weeds directly so you don't have to handle them twice. Empty the container into your Trimmings container for pick-up on garbage day. (Miriam)

Hold onto those chopsticks

Save the disposable chopsticks that you get with take-out sushi. Chopsticks can be used to make holes in the dirt to direct large seeds like nasturtiums. They also make wonderful plant stakes, most recently for my autumn crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*), which otherwise would have fallen over much sooner. (Selina)



Hands-on gardening tips

When enlarging or starting a new bed, outline the planned bed with a garden hose, dig up and turn sod over, cover with cardboard, and top with 6 inches (15 cm) or more of grass clippings, soil, bark mulch, or leaves. Within a season or two, they will have rotted down, leaving a lovely bed filled with worms, ready to plant. (Betty)

Buttermilk and beer

Some simple tricks to age garden ornaments. To grow moss on concrete, stone, or terracotta ornaments, wet thoroughly (if possible soak overnight). Sponge on a mixture of plain yogurt and water. Buttermilk, beer, or manure tea work as well. Rub a clump of moss over the surface of the item to spread spores. (Joan)

3 tool techniques

Several pairs of scissors left around the garden (tied in trees and shrubs) makes deadheading dead easy. (Betty)

If you lose tools around the garden, paint the tool ends in bright fluorescent colours. (Betty)

Hang rocks from tree branches to shape the tree. (I have seen this done with fruit trees to “space” the branches). (Joan)

Lasagna layering

Or use the “lasagna method” to make a new bed, from gardening writer Patricia Lanza. She recommends covering a turfed area with wet newspapers, and then piles of leaves to a height of about 6 inches (15 cm) and layers of manure, compost, and more leaves. Moisten well and, after five to six months, the garden is ready for planting. This is a great way to recycle leaves in the fall and no digging is involved in creating the new garden. (Kristin)

You deserve it

After working in the garden or just admiring it, bring some of the beautiful flowers inside.

Trivia for the day!

Did you know that flowers last longer when placed in metal vases? Research at Kansas State University proved that a rose is more than twice as likely to become overly mature within 10 days when placed in a crystal vase as opposed to an alloy vase. (Joan)

Send in your tips

You may have more gardening tips. If so, send them in to the newsletter whenever you think of them. We’ll keep track and try to run a regular gardening tips column. Happy gardening!

—Jane Sherrott



Preliminary program evaluation continues

(continued from page 3)

of questions and problems that MGs would likely have to answer at this year's clinics. Information on the "Winter Woes" submissions was included in the 2007 Update package and through the MG Admin email discussion forum.

We didn't get any submissions, so at the May regular meeting, Education Committee members prepared and gave five-minute talks on a variety of current topics, as a way of finding out if members were interested in listening to talks given by MGs and also to model topics and format. Feedback from the audience was very positive and reinforced survey findings that members would like more access to other MGs' expertise.

We also heard from audience members about reasons MGs hadn't responded to our request for submissions (for example, too little time to talk, not enough time to prepare, would have preferred a different topic). We'd still love to hear from you if you have a topic that you'd like to speak on at a future meeting. Just contact any of the Education Committee members if you have any questions or need more information.

Priorities for 2007: Evaluating the Basic Training program

We spent a lot of time exploring, reviewing, and modifying program evaluation models (that is, a

method of evaluating a program) currently used to evaluate education programs, as well as determining whether they could be adapted for our purposes and our audience.

The plan is to focus on an outcomes-based evaluation model, a model that is often used to evaluate education programs at all levels. Outcomes-based evaluation looks at the impacts, benefits, or changes to program participants as a result of their participation in the program. Outcomes-based evaluation determines if the program activities help to achieve some pre-specified outcomes. Outcomes are expressed in terms of knowledge, skills, values, or behaviours (for example, "The MG shall demonstrate the ability to convey to a member of the public in an MG clinic setting information about [*name of topic*] in an informed and engaging manner.")

We are continuing work on the preliminary program evaluation, describing, in detail, the components, characteristics, and content of the Basic Training program.

If you're interested in joining the Education Committee, we'd love to hear from you. Contact Lynne Christmas if you'd like more information.

—Dale Fitzpatrick

Summerland Report

Educating local gardeners through public presentations



The scorching heat in the Okanagan Valley during July appears to have diminished some of our garden pest populations, with the exception of the pine beetles, a worrisome threat to all of us who cherish our Ponderosas and other pines. The predictions of the experts—that up to 75 percent of the pines in the Okanagan and South-Central Interior will be attacked and destroyed within five years—can probably be believed, so we may have to shift our basic MG training program to focus on even drier conditions and more drought-tolerant plant choices, as well as erosion control in some areas.

Changing weather conditions make direct education of the gardening public through more public presentations increasingly important, and we have had some success in this area. In the spring, we brought in Sara Williams, horticulturist expert in drought-tolerant and hardy plants for alkaline Prairie soils (similar to many in the Okanagan), for two presentations to the public in Kelowna. They were a big success, supported by good turnouts. We hope to sponsor more such presentations by gardening experts, both to inform the public and to serve as a fundraiser for our chapter.

Educating the gardening public through more public presentations may allow us to decrease the number of nursery venues where we hold MG clinics. However, as garden centres do benefit from our presence, and new nurseries hear about the MG program, the demand is still strong. And nurs-

eries and garden centres are good starting points for new students. Of the 12 students who finished their Basic Program training at OK College earlier this year, nine have chosen to continue with the MG program. And two MGs who moved into this region have joined us, so our numbers continue to grow and we now have 39 active members.

In addition to nursery venues, activities this season included plant sales, garden tours, Communities in Bloom judging, worm farm demonstrations and several days of answering gardening questions at the Interior Provincial Exhibition in Armstrong. The Summerland MGs are also involved in work at hospices, researching material for presentations to garden clubs and similar garden groups, and writing articles.

These activities extend the clinic season, which for Summerland Master Gardeners runs from mid-April to mid-September, with virtually no activity in August.

As this report is being written, the fruit, vegetables and nuts are in high production gear, the late-blooming flowers are brightening the landscape, and the hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies are plentiful. It is a joy to create a beautiful garden in a climate that is not always gentle.

—Linda Sears
Program Coordinator
Summerland Master Gardeners



Spooing MGs at Our Best

*The story is true; some of the names have been changed to protect the innocent
(with apologies to Dagnet)*

“Are we there yet?”

“Just two more blocks. Does that walking frame not have a higher gear, Maude?”

“This walking frame is just fine, Mildred. It’s the potholes in the path that could trip it up and send me flying.”

“Ah, here we are; we’ve arrived. I can smell the strawberries from here. I thought we were going to be too early but there’s Christine, Carol, Joan, and Sharon; and there’s Judith in that shocking pink floral blouse—it makes me dizzy just looking at it.”

“Shirley’s done a great job in preparing her garden. Just look at that *Cimicifuga simplex* ‘Pink Spike’.”

“Not *Cimicifuga*, that genus was changed to *Actaea* in 1947.”

“And that peony, it looks very like *Paeonia* ‘Bowl of Beauty’ to me.”

“I don’t know how she does it really. It puts the gardens in the rest of the neighbourhood to shame a bit though, doesn’t it, Maude?”

“It would put mine to shame, too. Just look at how the *Philadelphus lewisii* arches over to meet the *Cotinus coggygria* to form that grand entrance archway over the front gate. Isn’t it gorgeous? And the scent is wonderful.”

“Never mind the plants, let’s go and investigate the strawberries. They’re the real reason for coming, aren’t they?”

“No. I came for the social side; I like to chat with other Master Gardeners. But look at all those strawberries; I heard they ordered nearly 20 pounds. We’ll never eat all that lot. We’ll have to have triple servings or take a doggie bag. It’s help yourself so I think I’ll just have a little mountain of strawberries, with a nice big piece of shortcake and some ice cream and a topping of whipped cream. How’s that?”

“Disgraceful. I think I’ll have the same. Who’s that serving the ice cream?”

“That’s Goretti, Barry’s wife.”

“Oh, poor thing.”

“Let’s take a seat at one of those tables. The speaker from Hastings Park is about to begin. They’ve gone to a lot of trouble with these tables and tablecloths. They’ve even got flowers on the tables. You can tell it’s a Master Gardener event.”

“I think I can take a few more strawberries and cream, Maude.”

“Let’s refill our bowls and then take a walk around the front; many of the best plants are around the front.”

“Her *Hypericum calycinum* is doing very well over there in the shade. Mind you it grows anywhere really; it’s very reliable. The hanging baskets are great, too. Apparently she replants them every year. I always plan to do the same but somehow never get around to it until it’s too late. Don’t they look healthy?”

“Yes, they do, Mildred. I tend to buy my hanging basket stuffers in the sale at the end of the season when they’re cheap, but for some reason they never look too great. I don’t know why.”

“And you call yourself a Master Gardener?”

“Time to go. They’re clearing away the dishes and Barry looks as though he’s going to start stacking the chairs even though they’re still occupied. I guess it’s been a long day for the organizers.”

“Yes, I suppose so. Oh, look. That’s Mary just arriving, three hours too late. I think she’s missed all the fun. Hello, Mary.”

“Hello, Mildred. Hello, Maude. Am I a bit late? We had to come all the way from Burnaby; it took us at least 15 minutes. The traffic was terrible. Then we got lost. Couldn’t find this address until I looked on the street map. I guess I should have done that first. Are you the only ones left?”

“Yes. We were among the first to arrive and now we’re the last to leave. See you at the next General Meeting in September. Bye for now.”

Triple Strawberry Delight—A garden party to remember

The Master Gardeners 2007 Summer Garden Party was held at Shirley McGrew's garden at 590 Kamloops Street, Vancouver, on Saturday, June 23, 1 to 4 p.m., with Marnie McGregor, a guest speaker from Hastings Park.

Marnie gave an interesting talk about the development of Hastings Park and the 2007–2010 Implementation Plan. Marnie explained the three-year planning stages: 2007 Site Analysis, including the community centre location options; the Heritage Study of the Livestock Building; the 2008–2009 thematic design of the park, Fair and Playland; and 2010 Phased Construction and development begins. Marnie also discussed the current status of the Momiji garden, Italian garden, and the Sanctuary. A number of Master Gardeners were familiar with the park and posed pertinent questions at the end of the talk.

A fledgling crow, test-flying its new wings had fallen to the ground just outside Shirley's garden fence just before the party was about to begin. Its parents, after dive-bombing the early arrivals, took up commanding positions on the power lines above and maintained a constant clacking and squawking throughout Marnie's talk but Marnie was more than able to counter this heckling.

The refreshments offered were strawberry shortcake with cream and ice cream and tea and coffee. The weather was kind and the party was enjoyed by all who supported this event. Thanks to the organizing committee: Shirley McGrew, Sharon Bleuler, Colleen Martin (who also baked the shortcake), Lynne Christmas, and Barry Roberts.

—Barry Roberts



"It's just like being at Wimbledon without the tennis," say Theresa D'Monte and Charlene Mason



"My peonies are this big," Doug Courtemanche tells Sally Maclachlan



MGs doing what they do best: chatting



Newsletter

of the
Master Gardeners' Association of
British Columbia
Affiliated with VanDusen
Botanical Gardens Association

Mission Statement

The Mission of the Master Gardeners' Association of British Columbia is to provide information about gardening to the community and to educate people about environmentally responsible gardening practices.

Please send all **contact information changes** to Pat Taylor, membership chair.

All other **newsletter correspondence** can be sent to the editor, Ann-Marie Metten, at ametten@telus.net.

Newsletter layout by Wendy Jones Carere.

The MG Newsletter is published in March, June, September, and December. **Deadline for submissions** to the December newsletter is Oct. 15, 2007.

www.bcmastergardeners.org
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MG Calendar

All events take place in the Floral Hall at VanDusen Botanical Garden, unless otherwise noted.

Tuesday, September 11, 9:30 a.m.
General meeting
Gymnasium, Shaughnessy United Church, 1550 West 33rd Avenue
Patrick Mooney, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture
Biophilia, Biodiversity, and Birds in Your Garden

"Biophilia" is the word Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson coined to describe the connections that human beings subconsciously seek with the rest of life.

Joint meeting with the VanDusen Guides.

Thursday, September 27, 8:15 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Whatcom County Master Gardener Foundation
14th Annual Advanced Training Seminar
Fox Hall at the Hampton Inn, 3985 Bennett Drive, Bellingham, WA
Cost: \$130 US

For information, please contact the Whatcom County Master Gardener office at 360-676-6736

Saturday, September 30
Deadline for nominations for MGABC Council

Tuesday, October 9, 7:30 p.m.
General meeting
John Schroeder, founder of Heritage Perennials
New Plants

Wednesday, October 10, 10:30 a.m.
Information session
2008 MG Basic Training Course
Cedar Room at VanDusen Botanical Gardens

Tuesday, October 23, 7:30 p.m.
Information session
2008 MG Basic Training Course
Cedar Room at VanDusen Botanical Gardens

Master Gardeners' Association of British Columbia Contact List 2007

Chair Lynne Christmas	Advanced Training June Pierson	Finance Karen Shuster	Plant Sale Coordinators Joan Bentley Loretta Barr	Web Masters Deb Dorey David Watkins
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