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# GREEN PAGES

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A newsletter for people interested in horticulture and natural resources in Western Wisconsin  
August 2009 No.14

## Feature Articles:

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- Black-eyed Susan 1
- Walking Onion 2
- County Survey 3
- Tomato Problems 4
- August Gardening Tips 5
- Gophers or Moles 6
- Events 7

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## About this newsletter

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This monthly newsletter's purpose is to disseminate research based information on topics of horticultural and natural resources in Western WI. In addition, it's purpose is to connect the public with local events of similar topics.

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## Black-eyed Susan

This favorite summertime flower is sometimes an annual, sometimes a perennial, and sometimes a biennial (flowering in its second year, then dying). All 25 species are native to North America. They produce daisy-like flowers in yellow or gold tones, sometimes with red or bronze accents. There are many garden cultivars in a range of heights, flower size and colors.

Most types grow 2-3' tall. They make excellent cut flowers and are attractive to butterflies and other

insects. Plant black-eyed Susans in full sun for the best flower display. Deadhead spent flowers to prolong blooming.

Perennial varieties may be propagated by division during their dormant season. All varieties can be easily grown from seed. Start indoors 6-8 weeks before planting outdoors.

*Provided by UW-Extension Master Gardeners*



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## Compost Education and Bin Sale

The Eau Claire Area Master Gardener Volunteer Association is offering a composting class Saturday, June 27<sup>nd</sup>, 9am to noon at the Eau Claire Exposition Center.

The cost is \$60 for the course which includes a 10.5 cubic foot compost bin. Bins are limited therefore

pre-registration and payment are necessary. Contact Erin LaFaive, 715-839-4712, [erin.lafaive@co.eau-claire.wi.us](mailto:erin.lafaive@co.eau-claire.wi.us). The Eau Claire County Exposition Center is located off of Hwy 93 just south of the I-94 interchange (5530 Fairview Dr).



## Plant Sale

Stop by the Eau Claire Area Master Gardener Association's Annual Plant Sale on Saturday, August 15th, from 9:00a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Sale location is the Eau Claire County Exposition Center on Lorch Avenue, (off of Highway 93 South out of Eau Claire to Lorch Avenue). Sale items include perennials, water garden

plants, and houseplants from Master Gardener gardens. Also garden art and craft items, fruit and vegetable starts, used gardening books and magazines. All proceeds help support UW-Extension Master Gardener educational outreach programs and community projects in the Eau Claire area.

## Egyptian Walking Onions

Susan Mahr, University of Wisconsin - Madison



The bulbils form on the ends of the spikes (L) and begin to grow small plantlets (LC) which may form another spike with more bulbils (RC) or will root and form new plants if they fall on or are placed in the ground (R).

An unusual perennial onion, *Allium x proliferum* (formerly classified as *Allium cepa* var. *viviparum*, *bulbiferum* or *proliferum*) is a cross between *Allium cepa*, the cultivated onion, and *Allium fistulosum*, the Welsh onion. It gets its common name from the way it “walks” across the garden. Instead of flowers, this plant produces topsets, a cluster of bulbils, at the top of the stalk where the flowers and seeds would normally be. The stalks eventually flop over from the weight of the bulbils (if not harvested) and replant themselves, thus beginning their “walk” across the ground. It is thought to be originally native to India or Pakistan, then later introduced into Europe by the Romans.

Also sometimes also called tree onions or topset onions, this vigorous and trouble-free plant is hardy in zones 3-10. It is not susceptible to juglone, so can be grown near black walnut trees. Thrips can be a problem in hot, dry summers, but the damage is primarily cosmetic.

The plants die back to look scruffy over the winter, but very early in the spring new green shoots emerge from the brownish bases. Like other onions, the leaves are hollow. The red or purple bulbs are only slightly enlarged from the stem, and about an inch long. By late spring and into early summer heavy spikes are produced that grow up to 2 feet tall and on which the bulbils are borne. These bulbils start out tiny and green, but eventually grow larger with reddish to brown skins.

Plant in full sun where you intend to have them for a long time (I’ve had the same plants, never

dug, for well over 10 years). It can even be grown in a mixed border for an unusual effect! are easy to propagate. Just break off the bulbils and plant! Place them no more than an inch deep and 4-5 inches apart. They can be separated, but will grow as a clump very well. They don’t need to be replanted as the similar multiplier onions do. They also multiply from the base, so established clumps can be divided as well. This is best done in spring.

There are many ways to use this plant. Dig the entire clump or just harvest individual leaves. The small, underdeveloped onions at the bottom of the mature plant are edible, but are very hot. Eat the tender young shoots and stems as green onions. The bulbils can be eaten, too, if not replanted (although I find peeling them rather tedious). They can also be stored for a few months. If you leave the plant it will produce topset bulbils the following year. If you want more onions, just plant a few new bulbils.

*A Horticulture Information article from the Wisconsin Master Gardener website, posted 17 July 2009*

### **Additional Information:**

*Growing Egyptian Onions – [www.seedsofknowledge.com/onion.html](http://www.seedsofknowledge.com/onion.html)*

## How Important is the Extension Office to You?

Again this year, Eau Claire County is facing a major budget crisis. It is estimated there will be more than a 2 million dollar deficit for 2010.

The County is looking at a number of ways to address this budget crisis from reducing programs, freezing wages and/or eliminating positions just to name a few.

Starting on **July 1, 2009**, there will be an Internet accessible survey available to all county residents. The purpose of this survey is to apply a numerical ranking to all the department/programs within the County (both mandated and non-mandated). These rankings will indicate the importance of the department/programs to the residents of Eau Claire County. The rankings will then help the County Board determine which department/programs will receive available funding.

Your support of the Extension Office during this economic struggle is vitally important for the continuation of the programs and services provided to our clientele. Please take a few minutes to answer the survey and let the County Board know how important Extension programs and services are to you.

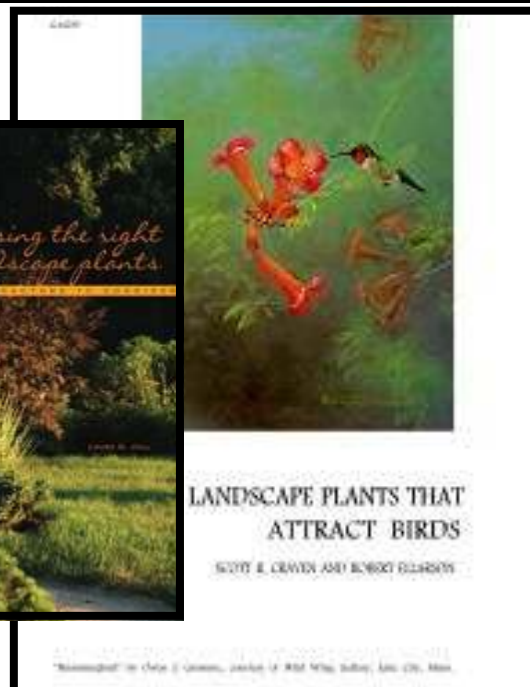
The survey can be accessed at <http://www.co.eau-claire.wi.us/>.

## Landscaping Information

If you are doing some landscaping check out the publication “A guide to selecting landscape plants for Wisconsin” by E.R. Hasselkus. It has information on trees, shrubs, vines, groundcovers including information on the form, adaptation, and zone all in a easy to read table. <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/A2865.pdf>

“Landscape plants that attract birds” by Scott Craven and Robert Ellarson is an easy to read 9 page publication. It includes information on Wisconsin birds, landscaping ideas, and living requirements for birds. <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/G1609.pdf>

“Choosing the right landscape plants: factors to consider” by Laura Jull is a illustrated 21 page booklet about landscaping fundamentals. <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/A3864.pdf>



## Tomato Problems

If your tomato plants have yellowing or black spots on the leaves – this article may be for you! Early blight and Septoria leaf spot affects leaves, stems, and fruit of tomatoes. Early blight is caused by the fungus *Alternaria solani* and produces yellowing of the leaves. Whereas Septoria leaf spot is caused by *Septoria lycopersici* and produces black spots.



**Septoria leaf spot. Note whitish**

Both of these tomato disorders thrive during moderate temperatures and abundant rainfall, becoming more evident as the plant sets fruit. Symptoms are primarily found on leaves, starting at the base of the plant, and by late fall may cause fruit to rot near the stem.

Septoria has helpers. The Septoria fungus can survive for three years on weeds in the same plant family as tomatoes such as jimsonweed (*Datura stramonium*), horsenettle (*Solanum carolinense*), groundcherry (*Physalis pruinosa*), and nightshades. For pictures of these plants go to Wisflora: Wisconsin Vascular Plant Species website <http://www.botany.wisc.edu/wisflora/>.

Prevention is the best defense. The spores of the infected leaves travel to uninfected leaves from the splashing of rainwater or simple watering.

Here are some prevention tips:

Choose a garden location that receives good exposure to sun and wind to promote drying. When planting

give plants enough room to promote air flow; as plants grow, use stakes or cages to keep the plants off the ground. Don't water late in the day unless you are using trickle irrigation. Use mulch around the plant as it acts as a barrier between soil and foliage to prevent spores from splashing onto leaves and fruit. Remove leaves at first sight of infection to slow the spread of the disease. Rotate tomatoes plants for 3-4 years and inspect purchased plants for leaf spots before transplanting. Early blight overwinters on infected plant debris for one year, on seed, or in soil so at the end of the growing season remove all refuse or if burying-bury deep. Do not compost infected debris unless you are sure you have prolonged heating to kill the disease.

Fungicides may help if used very early in the disease process and used regularly throughout the growing season. If you decide to use fungicides for disease control, be sure to read and follow all label instructions of the fungicide that you select to insure that you use the product in the safest and most effective manner possible.



**Early blight of tomato. Note**

## August Gardening Tips

### Trees and shrubs

- ☆ Early fall color is a warning that a tree is under stress. In maples, Premature fall color is often caused by major cracks in the bark or a root that is strangling the tree to death. A healthy tree will flare out all around its base; if your tree enters the ground as straight as a telephone pole, an underground root may be strangling the tree. This is called “girdling”. In most cases there is no cure—just nurture the tree with special watering and fertilizing to prolong the tree’s life. If the tree is young and the girdling roots are shallow, cut out the girdling roots.
- ☆ Now is a great time to plant trees and shrubs. Plant evergreens by the end of September so they are established before winter comes. Leafy trees and shrubs can be safely planted through October (and sometimes later).
- ☆ Rose plants can be full of disease this time of year. In particular, black spots can develop on the foliage.
- ☆ Start by removing the infected foliage. Also keep the foliage dry when watering to prevent disease spores from splashing all over the plant.

### Flowers and houseplants

- ☞ The easiest way to encourage your Christmas cactus to bloom is to set it outside in the shade. The night temperatures in the 50s will set the flower buds. If you keep the plant indoors, it will need about 14 hours of complete, uninterrupted darkness every night. Do not fertilize your plant during this bud initiation period, and water only to prevent the plant from shriveling. Once the buds appear, set the plant indoors where you can enjoy its beauty.
- ☞ Did you set any houseplants outside this summer? Now is the time to think about moving them back inside. Most houseplants are native to the tropics. Bring them inside before nighttime temperatures

fall in the 50s on a regular basis.

- ☞ This is a great time to take cuttings of impatiens, before they begin to decline in health. Snip six-inch long cuttings from healthy shoot tips. Remove the foliage from the bottom half of each cutting and slip it into a glass of water. Once well rooted, transplant the impatiens and grow them indoors near a sunny window. They’ll bloom all year round!
- ☞ Harvest sunflowers when their petals begin to drop and inner seeds are well filled. The back of the head will turn yellow and the leaves surrounding the head will turn brown. Cut off the head, leaving a foot of stalk attached, and hang in a warm dry place. After a couple weeks, remove seeds and store them in closed glass jars.

### Vegetables and herbs

- ☆ Winter squash fruits are ripe when their rind is hard, glossy, and reach their maximum intensity of color. The white spot on the underside of the fruit turns golden.
- ☆ Keep harvesting your vegetables regularly for maximum yields.
- ☆ Snap bean, tomato, pepper and squash flowers may fail to develop fruit when daytime temperatures rise above 90 degrees.
- ☆ Remove flower buds from onion stalks since they rob energy from the bulb. Harvest and use these onions first since they will not store well.
- ☆ Potatoes continue to develop underground as long as the vines are green. For now, dig only as many as you need for immediate use. We’ll dig up the plants later after their vines have died back.
- ☆ A cantaloupe is ripe when its fruit comes off the vine with a gentle tug.

## Gophers or Moles Destroying your Lawn?

Diana Alfuth, Horticulture Educator



Many of us have experienced it, especially in the more rural areas. We wake up in the morning, look outside at our lawn, and there is a fresh mound of pulverized soil that wasn't there the day before. You clean it up, and the next morning you look out and it's back—along with one or two new mounds! As the frustration builds, you wonder what to do?

What's causing it and how do you control it? Here in western Wisconsin, we're lucky (or unlucky) enough to have both pocket gophers and moles, both of which leave soil mounds in our lawns and fields. For whatever reason, perhaps our mild winters, there seem to be a large number of problems with gophers and moles this spring. One gopher or mole can do a lot of damage. It may look like your yard is infested with a large number of animals, when in reality it is only one!

First, you have to determine which critter is plaguing your lawn—pocket gopher or mole. If it's a mole, you will see raised tunnels in the lawn leading up to the soil mound. These are feeding tunnels, and dry weather causes the moles to tunnel at a deeper level to find food. If there are no raised tunnels, it's probably a pocket gopher. Which rodent you have will determine your method of attack.

Pocket gophers are vegetarians. They eat roots of plants. Moles, on the other hand, are mostly "meat eaters" and prefer to dine on grubs, worms, and insects. Both are active at night and do not want to be exposed to daylight. They form a series of tunnels, which they travel through each night. When they come to the surface, they create a mound of fresh soil.

While there are several poisonous baits on the market, they are not always effective because it is often difficult to get these critters to eat them! Therefore, the most effective way to remove a pesky gopher or mole from your yard is to trap it. Once you've determined if you have a mole or a gopher, you can purchase the appropriate type of trap.

Pocket gopher traps are to be set underground. Dig out around the soil mound until you find the hole leading to the tunnel. The tunnel can be 8 to 24 inches below the lawn surface. Set the trap and place it gently in the tunnel. Tie a string to the trap and attach it to a stake anchored on the lawn surface. This prevents the animal from taking the trap deep into the tunnel, and reminds you where you've set the trap. Then cover the hole with the loose soil, leaving a small portion open, so a ray of light goes into the tunnel. The gopher, who doesn't like daylight, will come to the surface to close up the hole and be trapped. Gophers are quite easy to trap in this way and it often takes just one or two nights to catch the culprit.

Moles, on the other hand, are more frustrating. They not only cause more damage to lawns with their raised tunnels, but they are more difficult to trap. If you have a severe mole problem, it might mean that you have a lot of grubs in your lawn, which are a food source for moles. Controlling the grubs may be the best way to control the moles. Mole traps are placed on the lawn surface, straddling a raised tunnel. When the mole next uses the tunnel, he vibrates the soil surface, which springs the trap sending a spike through the soil surface into the tunnel, hopefully catching the mole. However, moles are very sensitive to what's near their tunnel, and if they suspect something fishy, they will create a new tunnel around the trap! It may take more effort and time to catch a mole than it takes to catch a pocket gopher.

If you have problems with pocket gophers or moles damaging your lawn, keep in mind that they aren't intentionally trying to drive you crazy, they are just making a living the way moles and gophers do. Good luck!

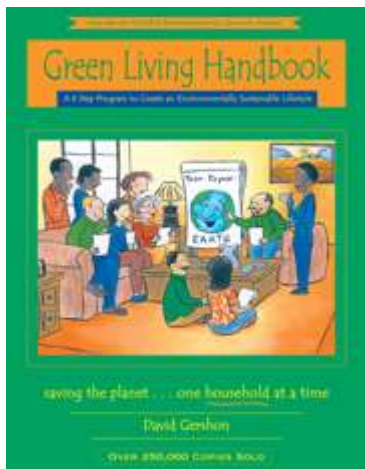


# Events

## New to the area: Eau Claire EcoTeams

Gather some good friends, family or co-workers and begin an adventure that will enable you to use our earth's precious and limited resources with greater care. At seven meetings over a period of several weeks and with the help of a workbook, you will work together as an EcoTeam to develop more sustainable lifestyle practices in five areas: garbage, water, energy, transportation and consumption. The program is easy, fun and a great way for you to make a commitment to leave a better world for future generations.

The Eau Claire EcoTeam program is supported by grants from the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board, JONAH and UW Extension. For more information, contact Erin LaFaive, Eau Claire County Horticulture Educator (715-839-4712, [erin.lafaive@co.eau-claire.wi.us](mailto:erin.lafaive@co.eau-claire.wi.us)) or Meg Marshall (715-835-1733, [eauclaireecoteams@gmail.com](mailto:eauclaireecoteams@gmail.com)).



## Preventing Plant Diseases

Brian Hudelson, UW Plant Disease Specialist, will talk about the theory and practice of plant disease management with emphasis on control of common diseases of plants of all kinds (woody ornamentals, fruits, vegetables, herbaceous ornamentals).



Eau Claire County Exposition Center  
August 26th, 10am-noon

Free

Register by calling Erin LaFaive, 715-839-4712  
Or email [erin.lafaive@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:erin.lafaive@ces.uwex.edu)



*A Field Guide to Invasive Plants of the Midwest*, edited by Katherine Howe, Mark Renz, Kelly Kearns, Jennifer Hillmer, and Ellen Jacquart.

This guide covers 36 species with identification as the main focus. Control methods are not listed. This publication is small enough to keep in a purse or glove compartment in the car.

Cost is \$4 and is sold at Eau Claire County UW-Extension Office.

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Unless otherwise noted, articles for this newsletter are submitted and/or written by Eau Claire County UW-Cooperative Extension Horticulture Educator Erin LaFaive. Unless otherwise noted, graphics are from clipart. Newsletter layout by Nikki Jackson.

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