

# "Lett-uce" Inform You



September 2010

## Are you interested in becoming a Colorado Master Gardener?

The Colorado State University Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program in Elbert County is made up entirely of volunteers. These volunteers help local Colorado State University Extension offices provide unbiased research-based gardening information to Elbert County residents. Master Gardeners are also involved in many community activities and projects such as writing articles, giving educational workshops and seminars, staffing informational booths at special events, and assisting with community-based garden projects.

Anyone who has an interest in gardening and helping others can apply for the Master Gardener Program. No particular gardening skill level is required. Applications may be obtained from the Elbert County Extension Office. Upon returning your application, you will be contacted to set up a time for an interview. If accepted into the program, Master Gardener Apprentices are required to attend college-level classes covering topics such as plant growth and development, soils, plant nutrition, insects, diseases and diagnosis, floriculture, vegetables, turf management, xeriscaping, houseplants and wildlife. The classes begin in January and run through the end of March. They are held once a week from 9 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Douglas and Arapahoe County Extension Offices.

Upon completing the classes, Master Gardener Apprentices are required to spend fifty hours working for the Elbert County Extension office between mid-March and October. Thirty-six of those hours are spent working in the Master Gardener office, answering questions and assisting customers with samples of plants for diagnosis. The remaining fourteen hours are to be spent on outside projects.

There is no fee to submit an application. However, once accepted into the program, participants are charged a fee to cover the cost of resources provided during training. Financial assistance is available, if needed.

This is a great way to increase your gardening skills, meet some wonderful people and be of service to the community all at the same time.

*If you are interested in becoming an Elbert County Master Gardener, please call (303) 621-3162 to obtain further information and an application.*

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Hummingbirds are traveling to the warmer climates and still need to find nectar along the way. Keep your feeders out until the end of October and bring in if it will freeze at night. Thank you, hummer fans!

### Tomatoes Not Ripening?

Try cutting back on watering, cut back the tips of your indeterminate (the ones that get tall) tomatoes, and cut a few of the non-fruit bearing branches to allow more sunlight to reach those hard to see tomatoes. Cover plants with a frost blanket or, if you pick tomatoes before a freeze, place on a layer of newspaper and cover with more newspaper for a quicker ripening time.

# Plants for your Garden: The Colorado 2010 Plant Select® Program

by Audrey Steffan,  
Colorado Master Gardener

## Red Feather *Echium amoenum*



Red Feathers, *Echium* (EK-ee-um) from Greek echio (viper), because the nutlets resemble a viper's head and *amoenum* (am-oh-EN-um) meaning delightful, is a wonderful new addition to the Plant Select family.

This beautiful perennial recently introduced from the Caucasus Mountains will tolerate a wide variety of conditions. It will grow in clay, sandy soil or loam with little to no irrigation needed once it is established. It can be planted in full sun or part shade. This plant will flower from early spring to frost if it is deadheaded. The plant has a basal tuft of dark green foliage which produces spikes of feathery flowers and grows to about 14 inches tall. The flower spikes somewhat resemble our native *Liatris punctata*. Red Feather has a unique russet-red flower with the seeds consisting of four brownish-black nutlets. This plant can be grown from division of rootstocks and by cuttings of shots or from seeds sown in good light soil from March to May.

The Red Feather is part of the Boraginaceae family, which grows in most European countries and in northern Iran. The borage flower is used as a medicinal herb in France and the Iranian borage is used in traditional medicine for infectious diseases, flu and as an anti-febrile.

The hardiness USDA zones for this plant are 3-9 (up to 9000').

For additional information or to find retailers that carry the Plant Select® plants, visit their website at [PLANTSELECT.ORG](http://PLANTSELECT.ORG).

## Two Native Grasses

By Andrejs Tobiss  
Colorado Master Gardener

Two native companion grasses on our property are the Blue Grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*) and Buffalo Grass (*Buchloe dactyloides*). They seem to be intermingled and by casual observation, it is hard to tell the difference between the two. Both are warm season, low growing

perennial grasses, so they appeared rather late this year. They were hardly noticeable among the other grasses during June, but after the July hail and rains, they showed up the best ever. The most noticeable part of these native grasses is the curved flowering spikes that resemble eyelashes.



Blue Grama is a major native species of the western Great Plains and the Southwest. It is one of the most widely distributed of all native grasses. Blue Grama in its growth habit

forms tufts or bunches. It is densely tufted with gray green basal leaves. It has bluish purple cast when young and takes on straw color at maturity. The culms or flower stems can grow up to 10 inches under good conditions. The inflorescence consists of 1 to 3 one-sided spikes that looks like a comb or a flag. Each inflorescence contains both stamens with pollen and pistils.

Buffalo Grass is a low growing, sod former perennial, reproducing readily by stolons (above ground stems). It has separate plants for each sex. The pistillate plant has inflorescences that are small burs, which contain seeds, while the staminate plant has inflorescences that are one-sided spikes.

Buffalo Grass is native to the southern Great Plains, Texas, Arizona and Colorado. It spreads rapidly by surface runners and forms a dense matted turf. During the growing season the leaves are fine, grayish green turning to a light straw color when mature.

There are numerous improved varieties of both species used as ground cover, low maintenance turf, and erosion control or grazing on range. They can be propagated by seed or plugs.

Compared to Kentucky bluegrass and similar grass lawns, these grasses need less water, fertilizer and mowing. These grasses are also available as plugs or sod and can be all female, thus giving a more turf-like appearance. Both Blue Grama and Buffalo Grass tend to go dormant and turn brown earlier in the fall and become green later in the spring.

Place a thin board or heavy cardboard under ripening melons and pumpkins to avoid decay and bug damage.

# The Master Gardener Program

By Aija Tobiss  
Colorado Master Gardener

The Morrill Act of 1862- Sponsored by Congressman Justin Morrill of Vermont gave to every state, which had remained in the Union, 30,000 acres of public land for every member of its congressional delegation. The states were to sell this land and establish colleges. These colleges came to be known as Land Grant Colleges.

Cooperative Extension was established in 1914, also by an act of Congress, The Smith Lever Act, the purpose of which was "In order to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture, home economics, and rural energy,....." Section I Smith Lever Act.

The Colorado Master Gardener program was established in 1974. The first Master Gardener meeting was held in 1975. The counties that participated were Jefferson, Pueblo, Denver, Larimer, Arapahoe, Adams, El Paso and Weld. A program was devised and training centers were established in Colorado Springs and Denver. Later other counties were added. In 1979 this program was approved as a state "line-item budget activity".

The Master Gardener program is part of the Colorado State University Extension office. The purpose is to provide research based education to the gardening public. The Master Gardeners, all volunteers, are trained by CSU professionals. The training is an eight week program with once a week 6 hour days. Topics include: Plant Growth and Development, Soils and Plant nutrition, Turfgrass Management, Entomology, Diagnostics. Minimum training is 40 hours. Master Gardeners are required to update their training each year.

The Elbert County Master Gardener program is a thriving one. The office is located at the Fair Grounds. During the growing season Master Gardeners are in the office Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. The public is invited to call with their questions. During the winter months the Master Gardeners can also be reached by calling the Extension Office at: 303-621-3162. Questions will be forwarded to the Master Gardener who is on call.

# Thank You Elbert County!!!

The Master Gardeners of Elbert County would like to thank everyone who bid on our Silent Auction items at the county fair this year. We would also like to say a big "Thanks" to the following merchants

- Tagawa's
- Outback Liquors
- The Elizabeth Park and Recreation
- Christi-Lyn of Hair Design Team in Castle Rock
- Mountain Man in Kiowa
- Barr Bear Country Cuts in Kiowa
- Spring Valley Golf Course
- The Takoda Tavern in Parker

and individuals who so generously donated items to support the silent auction.

We would also like to thank JC's Greenhouse for the donation of the bedding plants that the Master Gardeners planted in the barrels to be placed around the fairgrounds and Extension Office. They are bright, colorful and very beautiful.

The Master Gardeners appreciate all the support the county has given us this past year at our various seminars, at the fair booth and from all the calls that we have gotten at the Extension Office. The Master Gardeners will be at the Extension Office to answer your questions on Tuesday and Thursday 1:00 – 4:30 p.m. until September 30<sup>th</sup>. After September 30<sup>th</sup> call (303-621-3162) or bring your sample to the Extension Office at the fairgrounds and the Master Gardeners will handle these items on an "on call" basis.

Did you know that some vegetables actually taste better after they have been exposed to some light frost? The cold mellows and sweetens their flavor by causing some of the starches in the plants to change to sugars. Brussels sprouts, parsnips, kale, and carrots all taste sweeter after frost.  
*"500 Terrific Ideas for Gardening" by Anne Halpin*

# Mosquito Management Around the Home

Colorado State University  
Fact Sheet 5.526

- Eliminate standing water in low spots, ditches, gutters and similar areas.
- Empty weekly or remove receptacles that collect rainwater (bird baths, old tires).
- Mosquito netting and tight screens can provide mosquito-free areas.
- Some mosquitoes are attracted to lights. Reduce unnecessary lighting to make yards less attractive.
- "Bug zappers" do not reduce mosquito landing or biting. They attract and kill many insects but few are mosquitoes that attack humans. Many of the insects killed are beneficial because they feed on Garden pests.
- Ultrasonic devices, such as those that claim to mimic dragonflies, do not affect mosquito activity.
- Light-colored clothing is less attractive to adult mosquitoes. Tightly woven fabrics give some protection against biting.
- Citronella and "Avon Skin So Soft" can be used for short periods of relief. Some naphthalene products (such as "Mosquito Beater") can be broadcast in yards for temporary relief from adult mosquitoes.
- Adult mosquitoes rest in shrubbery and other shaded areas during the day. These areas can be treated with approved insecticides. Foggers for flying insects can also be used, but will provide only short-term relief. Various aerosol insecticides are available for controlling mosquitoes indoors.

DEET is considered the most effective mosquito repellent. There is concern about undesirable side effects on young children and others who might be unusually sensitive to this chemical. Side effects have been associated mostly with heavy use to avoid transmission of Lyme disease by ticks. The risk must be balanced against the benefits provided by its insect and tick repellency. The Environmental Protection Agency has issued precautions for DEET use:

- Apply only to exposed skin and clothing, not to skin under clothes.

- Avoid frequent reapplication or skin saturation.
- Do not apply to cuts, wounds or irritated skin.
- Keep away from eyes and mouth.
- Do not apply to hands of young children.
- For children, use products with concentrations less than 20 percent.
- Do not spray directly over face.
- Avoid breathing DEET aerosol sprays.
- Wash treated skin and clothing after returning indoors.

For additional information regarding mosquitoes, you can access Fact Sheet 5.526 **Mosquito Management** in its entirety at the Colorado State University website at this location <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/insect/05526.html> or you can call the Elbert County Extension Office and request a copy.

## Do you know the life cycle of a mosquito?

A mosquito lives 10-14 days. That is why populations can increase so quickly in wet weather. So follow the directions provided to keep all standing water around your home eliminated.

## Do you grow melons or winter squash? If so, here are some interesting tidbits on getting better flavor and ripening them.

- While melons are maturing, place them on cans or boxes out from under the leaves so they will have maximum sun exposure. They need the warmth to develop their flavor.
- To help ripen melons faster, at the end of August remove all remaining blossoms and tiny fruit from melons and winter squash vines. This will help the plant distribute its energy to ripening the larger fruits before the first frost.

# Antlions: The “Jaws of the Insect World”

by Raylene Owen  
Colorado Master Gardener

Phylum: Arthropoda  
Class: Insecta  
Order: Neuroptera

Mid to late summer is the time to see antlions. Antlions are named for their predation on ants. There are about 50 species in Colorado. They belong to the Order, Neuroptera, which means “nerve wing” and refers to the adults which have two pairs of membranous wings with many veins and cross veins.

Antlions attract attention for the cone shaped pits that the larvae form in dry, sandy areas, where there is some protection from the rain, such as around the foundations of buildings, around barns, or at the base of eroding cliffs. A particularly inviting area may be pockmarked with hundreds of antlion pits. This must resemble a mine field to small insects walking through.



Antlion larvae look like chubby clods of dirt less than a half inch long. They are armed with sickle-like jaws, half again as big as their bodies. They lie motionless

in the bottom of funnel shaped pits with their jaws sticking up. If an ant or other small insect falls into the pit, it slides in to the waiting jaws, which snap shut and capture the ant. If the antlion misses, it kicks sand at the ant by snapping its abdomen, causing the ant to lose its footing and slide back down in to the waiting jaws.

Well fed antlions pupate in a silken cocoon hidden in the sand. They metamorphose into grey, lacy, winged adults. The wings often have spots. As these are primitive insects, when they fly, their wings seem to work like egg beaters, rather frantic and uncoordinated.

The adult’s body is long, resembling a damsel fly. One characteristic that differentiates antlion adults from damsel flies is that antlions have prominent, knobbed antennae. The adults don’t feed. They live on their stored fat, while waiting to mate. The females then find a sandy place to lay their eggs and start the cycle all over again.

Antlions provide a great biology lesson for children (as well as adults). To “hunt” antlions you need a plastic spoon, a flat plastic box or plate, and a magnifying glass. When you find a pit, select a large one and gently slide

the spoon under the very bottom of the pit. Carefully sift the contents of the spoon over your flat container. If you are lucky you will see the antlion larvae move and can separate it from the dirt. Remember they are supremely camouflaged and will look like a small clod with jaws. Set the antlion back down in a good sandy place and watch it disappear before your very eyes by backing down into the sand. You can also tickle the sides of a pit with a straw and watch the antlion kick sand at the imaginary insect. After observations, always remember to replace the antlion back where you found it.

Thanks to the following for help with the information in this article:

*Guide to Colorado Insects*, Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University entomologist  
*The Common Insects of North America*, Lester Swan and Charles Papp

## Interesting Insect Facts: Blue Mud Daubers They Eat Black Widow Spiders

by Raylene Owen  
Colorado Master Gardener

Phylum: Arthropoda  
Class: Insecta  
Order: Hymenoptera



This solitary, metallic blue to blackish wasp with blue wings is a common resident in Elbert County. It does not make its own mud nest, but takes over the Black and Yellow Mud Daubers’ nests, which you may see upon the outside wall of your

house.

The Blue Mud Dauber opens the mud cell by moistening the clay with water and empties it of the spiders and egg deposited by the other wasp. It then deposits its own paralyzed spiders into the cell and lays an egg on the first spider. When the cell is full, the wasp seals the cell. It mostly paralyzes black widow spiders from which its larvae will feed. This wasp is notably the most effective predator of this spider.

Thanks to the following for help with the information in this article:

*Guide to Colorado Insects*, Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University entomologist  
*The Common Insects of North America*, Lester Swan and Charles Papp

# My Journey

By Jackie Steinheimer  
Colorado Master Gardener Apprentice

My journey into service to my community began last year when I, along with 3 others, was given the opportunity to become a Colorado Master Gardener. At this time I had been gardening in Colorado's Front Range for over 10 years, dabbling in everything from xeriscape gardening (now called water-wise gardening), vegetable gardening, rose care, water gardening, lawn care, and landscape design. My children were in school full time and I was at a point in my life where I could give back to my community without too many restraints. I was prepared to meet new challenges and assisting fellow gardeners with their gardening problems appealed to me.

After filling out my application and interviewing with the Master Gardeners, I was ecstatic to learn of my acceptance into the program and soon thereafter picked up my Master Gardeners' (MG) manual. I was a little stunned to see it was thick enough to be used as a door stop that could stand up to Elbert County winds but once I opened it, I found it chock full of useful information and a treasure trove of resources that I will use for many years to come.

The New Year brought about the start of my training classes taught by Advanced/Specialists Master Gardeners from the Colorado State University Extension Service and professors from Colorado State University. It had been some time since I was in a formal educational setting and the first day of class found me giddy as well, a school girl. The first class taught by David Whiting (the CO Master Gardener Program Coordinator) brought home the significance MG's serve in conveying research based information to the gardeners in our communities. Each class was engaging and informative and at the end of the day I would find myself at home looking around my landscape thinking "well that explains why that tree is struggling".

Once the training classes concluded it was time to man the office phones. To be honest, I was a little apprehensive about this part but soon found that each MG I worked with brought a wealth of life experiences and knowledge as well as unique insight to community and garden related interests. I've learned from my fellow MG's everything from Bee Keeping to wine making and chickens to various 4-H projects. I have also found that the true strength of the MG program is the people. Each MG truly has a sense of service to the community and it shows in the commitment and many volunteer hours they give in order to help educate the community as a whole. As my first year comes to a close, I find myself already looking forward to next year and the experiences it will bring. I'm excited to continue to meet and work with the Elbert County community members and I feel blessed to have been given the opportunity to work with such a wonderful group of people. Let the journey continue...

The Master Gardeners are updating their contact database this year and trying to become "green" with the mail list. If you would like to continue to receive the "**Lett-uce Inform You**" newsletter, please provide the information below by February 1, 2011. We need to hear from you even if the current information we have for you is correct. If we have not received notification from you by February 1, 2011, you will be dropped from the database. If you would like to help us become "green" and only receive the newsletter by email, you can provide just your email address. If you do not have an email and still want to receive a hard copy, please provide your mailing address. If you want to receive email notifications, plus a hard copy, please provide both your mailing address and email address. You can send the information to the Master Gardeners by one of these methods: mail it to the Kiowa Extension Office (address on the back page), email it to the Master Gardeners email [elbertmg@ext.colostate.edu](mailto:elbertmg@ext.colostate.edu), call or fax the Kiowa Extension Office (number on the back page), or drop it off at the Kiowa Extension Office.

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip Code** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email** \_\_\_\_\_

# Things to Do This Winter

## September

- Transplant and/or divide peonies, if necessary. Be aware that they hate to be moved. To transplant or divide peonies, dig up the entire plant, making sure to get all of the roots. At the crown of the plant, there are pink buds. Use a knife to divide the plant so there are no more than three buds in each division. Dig a hole in amended soil and plant the divided peonies close to the surface, covering the buds with no more than 1" of soil. Water well. Make sure you plant them in a sunny, well drained location.
- Divide daylilies, if needed. Dig them up in clusters, making sure to get the roots. Put 2 gardening forks down the middle of the cluster and separate into two pieces. If the cluster is very large, keep the outside growth for replanting and discard the inside because it is the oldest. Water well and as needed.
- Purchase bulbs for fall planting.
- Collect seeds from plants you want to save for next year's planting. Make sure you mark the storage container with the name of the plant.
- Stop deadheading roses so they will form rose hips. This will help the roses to start hardening off for winter.
- Harvest green tomatoes before the first frost. Let them ripen indoors in indirect sunlight.
- Watch for predictions of early frosts. Cover plants if necessary. You can use bed sheets, newspapers, paper bags, blankets, burlap or row cover, but do not use plastic to cover the plants.
- If needed, water, water, water.

## October

- Plant bulbs such as tulips, hyacinths, daffodils and crocuses.
- To extend the growing season for your vegetables and herbs use row covers.
- Plant garlic cloves.
- Harvest brussel sprouts and pumpkins after the first mild frost. Pumpkins are ready to harvest when they are orange in color and the skin is hard. You should not be able to penetrate the skin with your thumbnail. Leave several inches of stem on the stock.
- Put mulch around carrots and other root crops to keep the ground from freezing. You can continue to harvest for another few months.
- Harvest winter squash and gourds. Cure in a warm dry place for 10 days. Then store in a cool dry place.
- Continue to water, if needed.

## November

- Cut back perennials so they will bloom better next year.
- Keep heavy snow off of tree and shrub limbs. Keep the snow on low-lying shrubs to act as an insulator.
- Mulch roses when temperature in your yard has dropped to 22°.
- Clean and store all tools and lawn mowers. To clean your tools, mix 1 part motor oil with 3 parts sand in a bucket. Dip the tools into this mixture to clean dirt and debris off of them. The sand will remove the dirt and debris and the oil will keep them from rusting.
- Harvest and store potatoes. Potatoes should only be harvested after the first fall frost. If you plan on storing them, let the potatoes remain on the vine for two weeks before picking them. Let them cure after picking by putting them in a pile in a dark area with good air circulation and temperatures between 55° and 65° for at least a week. If the temperatures are right, you can leave them in a pile in the garden and cover them with burlap. But make sure you protect them from rain and moisture. To store, place them in a dark, fairly humid area with temperatures between 35° to 40°, but no colder than 35°.
- Spade your vegetable garden and add organic matter which will break down by next spring.

## Things to do all winter

- Put out a bird feeder and water for the birds that call your garden home.
- Start thinking about your garden for 2011. Makes plans for what you will plant and design the lay out.
- Use kitty-litter, sand or birdseed on driveways and icy paths. Do not use salt or chemicals that can build up in the soil and eventually cause problems for plants.
- Make sure you are taking care of your houseplants by watering and fertilizing them with a slow-release fertilizer.

## Winter Watering is important:

- Check the ground several inches down, if it is dry, and then water. Overwatering isn't good for the plants either. So make sure you check before watering.
- Don't let water puddle because it could freeze.
- Water midday between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when temperatures are near 50° and the ground is not frozen or covered with snow.

*"Colorado Month-to-Month Gardening" by Kelli Dolecek*



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*September 2010*

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Master Gardener Office Hours are Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, April through September from 1:00 to 4:30 p.m. Stop by the Extension Office at the Fairgrounds in Kiowa or give us a call at 303-621-3162 Kiowa. You may also email questions to [elbertmg@ext.colostate.edu](mailto:elbertmg@ext.colostate.edu).

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Do you have a friend or neighbor who might wish to receive this newsletter? Please call or email the Extension Office with their name and address. Also let us know if you wish to receive this newsletter electronically. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Sheila Kelley  
Interim Elbert County Extension  
Director  
Colorado State University

### **Congratulations to the Open Class Fair Winners**

The Elbert County Master Gardeners heartily congratulate all the winners in the Open Class Floriculture and Horticulture divisions, but particularly:

- Raylene Owen, Grand Champion in Floriculture
- Doris Smith, Reserve Grand Champion in Floriculture
- Raylene Owen, Grand Champion in Garden Crops
- Audrey Steffan, Reserve Grand Champion in Garden Crops
- Kayla Mulkin, Judge's Choice of overall Floriculture, for her flower arrangement
- Claudia Morgan, Judge's Choice for xeriscape flower, the Rudbekia "Cherokee Sunset"
- Raylene Owen, Judge's Choice for Garden Crops, her gorgeous strawberries

We hope you had a chance to look at the Open Class and 4-H exhibits this year. There were some beautiful flowers, herbs, fruits and vegetables in spite of the winds, hail, and insects common to Elbert County.

If you did not enter anything in the Floriculture or Horticulture Open Class this year, you might want to start planning for next year's Open Class now. Hope to see you in 2011.