

It's Seed Starting Time: Master Gardener Classes will Help!

Courtesy Bonner County Daily Bee

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The advent of rains heralds the coming of spring. Though our deep snow is tenacious, it will gradually melt into the earth, leaving rich but cold soil which needs to warm a bit before planting.

While we're waiting, the Master Gardeners have planned their annual Home Horticulture series workshops around the theme of getting ready. A variety of experts in several subjects will provide needed help for anyone planning to create and/or maintain a garden — be it vegetable, ornamental, or a bit of both — and the landscape around it.

Scheduled for 6-8 p.m. Wednesday evenings at the Cooperative Extension Center, Bonner County Fairgrounds, the workshops will begin in March and run into the first week in May. Attendees will still have plenty of time to put their newfound expertise to work for the usual first-of-June planting out. Subjects and presenters are as follows:

March 18: "Starting your Garden Indoors from Seed" will be presented by Master Gardener Jennifer Costich-Thompson. Her hands-on class, based on her own considerable experience, will include soil preparation, starting seeds, handling starts, hardening off, transplanting and any necessary season extenders.

March 25: "Composting 101" by Extension Educator Mike Bauer, will cover the complete nuts and bolts of this vital subject. He'll discuss compost bin construction, what materials to compost, compost maintenance, and how and when to use it in your garden.

April 1: "Growing Potatoes in Idaho" will be covered by "The Bonner County Spud Queen" MG Pat Van Volkinburg. An annual winner at the BC Fair, she offers her incredible variety of potatoes each summer at the Sandpoint Farmers' Market, along with other of the veggies grown at her home-farm, "Bountiful Organics." Pat will discuss varieties to grow, soil preparation, planting, tending through the summer and harvesting.



**VALLE
NOVAK**

**Weekend
Gardener**

April 15: "Ask the Experts," a Panel with Laurie Brown, MG and co-owner of Northstar Farms with husband Tim; Loie DeLaVergne, MG and fabled "wizard of the perennials;" Diane Green, respected Organic grower and Farmers' Market vendor, who with husband Tom operates their farm "GreenTree Naturals;" Jennifer Costich-Thompson, Pat Van Volkinburg, Mike Bauer and Valle Novak. Join in this fun evening by bringing your toughest gardening questions to be solved by these "gardening gurus."

April 29: "Pruning - Beneficial and Decorative" will be addressed by Rich Del Carlo. A certified arborist, and frequent MG event speaker, Rich will demonstrate pruning fruit trees, landscape trees and shrubs, espalier, and proper care and sharpening of your pruning tools.

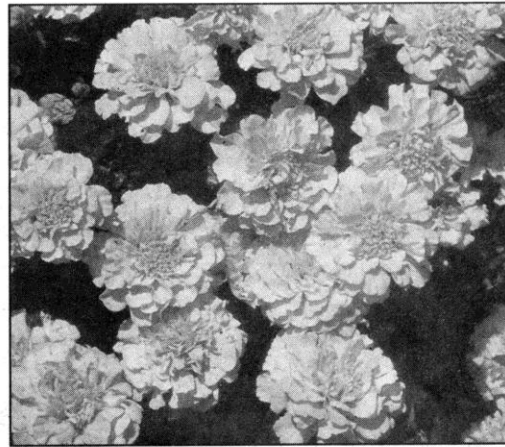
May 6: "Potagers" — those traditional small French "soup" gardens containing the freshest of culinary herbs and small veggies, will be described and their practicality discussed by MG Emeritus Valle Novak. She will show you how to plant your own in a tiny plot, a large pot or group of pots and will even plant one in class.

Register by calling the Bonner County Extension Office, 263-8511.

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Y'all come! All former Master Gardeners are invited to attend the "Welcome Back" brunch on Friday, March 6, from 10:30 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Bonner County Extension office, Fairgrounds.

Associate or reinstatement will be discussed, the newly expanded plant clinic will be shown, and upcoming projects, activities and volunteer opportunities presented while sharing refreshments with old and new friends. Please RSVP with Patty at 263-8511.



The cheery marigold is a favorite border plant, as welcome in the vegetable garden as well as an edible ornamental.

SPOTLIGHT: Marigolds

The cheery marigold (*Tagetes*, shown above) is a favorite border plant, equally welcome in the veggie garden as an edible ornamental.

Coming in a variety of designs from petaled with eyes, fully petaled with hidden eyes and puffy "snowball" types, these hardy annuals are long-lasting as cut flowers, too.

Easily grown from seed, these upright low-growers will brighten your garden, pot or window box or line your path from early summer till the first fall frost. Originally a rich orange, marigolds now come in yellow, red, gold, white and bicolors.

The seeds can be sown directly in the garden, but in our cool Zone 3-5 climate, indoor starting is preferable, since it allows the soil

to warm a bit. Indoor seed planting should take place four to six weeks before setting out. Considering that early June is our general "last frost" date, and that setting out hearty, healthy-sized transplants is best, count back on your calendar to determine a practical seed planting date. Remember that seedlings left too long in tiny pots become spindly, and also that baby plants need to be hardened off outdoors before putting into the ground. Plan to transplant into larger containers before setting out, and give your seedlings plenty of time to develop a good root system supportive of a sturdy plant.

It's entirely acceptable to purchase started plants, but the fun of growing your own is a delightfully soul-satisfying experience.