

My Day as a Volunteer in the Master Gardener Office

by Emily Chase

I arrived for my solo shift a few minutes early, so that I could sign the roster and check to see if there were any messages on the system. There were three. I listened to them, and made notes so that I could do the appropriate research, and then make calls back to these people.

One of the requests concerned the use of an alternative to ASG pressure treated lumber for raised beds. The caller had found a web site, www.naturalselect.com, and wanted to know if the Master Gardeners were aware of this new product. I reviewed the site, and noted that one of the uses of the product was "raised beds". I telephoned the caller and we discussed his concerns, and I recommended that he contact the company concerning any safety issues such as chemicals leaching into the soil.

A second caller had a question concerning eating the fruit from flowering plum trees. Research indicated that they are safe and make wonderful jams and jellies. I returned this call and found that the woman had already received her answer. Her daughter, who has the flowering plum trees, had called the county extension office in her area (Lane County, Oregon) and was told by the Master Gardener on duty that 'all plums, flowering or otherwise, are safe to eat'.

The third callback was in regard to black spots on tomatoes. The problem was identified as blight, and the recommendation was to remove the infected parts, and to use a copper spray. I mentioned that there are varieties that are resistant to blight, and in the future it might be a good idea to look for one of these. I later had another call with this same issue.

There was one walk-in during the day. A gentleman brought in a pear leaf, which appeared to have some whitish spots on it. He said that he had sprayed his orchard, but that the spray he uses is clear. He was concerned that someone might have put something in his sprayer, which is left at the orchard and unsecured. The sample was tagged, the problem noted, and left for the county extension officer to research.

Other calls that I received during the day concerned the following problems:

1. One woman had found numerous silverfish bugs on her roof, which is being resingled. What to do? I recommended that she contact an exterminator, as the problem sounded too big for her to handle with products available to the homeowner.
2. How to get rid of English Ivy? This man indicated that he had a patch of it growing along a fence on the back of his property. It is nowhere near any garden. Suggested that he dig it out, but he said there was too much of it. Research indicated that a systemic herbicide such as glyphosate could be used. I advised him to be sure to follow the label.

3. Apple trees that are not producing fruit was the topic of another call. Questions revealed that these were newly planted dwarf varieties (two) that were compatible pollinators. The fact that they were newly planted was the clue that they might not produce for 2 to 5 years. Research confirmed this.
4. Another caller wanted to know if he could plant another crop of shallots after just harvesting some. I researched this and found that there would be sufficient warm days left for this to be accomplished, and advised him of that fact.

All in all, during my four-hour shift at the Master Gardener office, there were ten calls and one walk-in client. I had sufficient time to do my research and respond. All contacts were noted on the contact sheets. I also had time to review new materials on the shelves, and to file some materials that had been pulled out by a previous volunteer and not returned to their appropriate place.

Emily Chase