


BUILDING AN OBELISK

By Jaya Krishnagopalan

Several years ago, Barbara Whatley, Master Gardener class of 2003, built an Obelisk for her garden. When she and I started working in the Kiesel demonstration garden, Barbara suggested that we build four obelisks, one for each corner flower bed, and grow purple hyacinth beans and surround the obelisks with perennials. This was a wonderful idea as the obelisks would give more dimension to the garden. So, we bought treated wood, cut the desired widths and lengths and built them in two afternoons. Barbara picked the most beautiful “Martha Stewart” green stain for them. The purple hyacinths were extremely happy and flourished climbing and filling these structures.

We wanted to make more for our own gardens; so, I made a parts list and diagram (see page 6) for future use. This turned out to be a handy idea. Soon, we built four more obelisks. Gita Smith and Diane Blue joined us in this venture. We finished the day with each of us completing a new obelisk for each of our gardens and having a lot of fun while doing so.

We had so much fun, I wanted to share the diagram and instructions with my fellow Master Gardeners. It is easy to follow the diagram and instructions if anyone is interested in making an obelisk on their own. I even cut all the pieces for two obelisks except the 6-foot long pieces and took them to Honolulu and built them for my son’s garden – we just had to buy the ready cut 6-foot pieces in the hardware store there.

So, I thought – why not publish the diagram and instructions in our newsletter? Maybe you will want to build one or two for your garden and for someone else as gifts. Enjoy!!! 





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The Wait Is Almost Over

By Chuck Browne

It's almost over....winter that is. When I was a child and would wish for a birthday or for Christmas to hurry up, my mother would say to me, "You shouldn't wish your life away." This time of year though, it is hard not to wish for spring to arrive quickly. The first signs are here. My daffodils are starting to show a hint of yellow under their protective green cover. Winter Honeysuckle (*Lonicera fragrantissima*) is in full bloom now. The species name "fragrantissima" says it all. The fragrance of this shrub will get your blood flowing on even the coldest, dreary February day.

As gardeners, we associate different times of the year with what plant is blooming or how their fragrance affects our outdoor living space. Let's not forget the fauna that live in our gardens. Almost every gardener watches birds. Have you ever landscaped for frogs? On Thursday, February 3, Marcia Gibson and I were sitting on the back row during the quarterly Master Gardener meeting at Kiesel Park. Even over the sounds of the presentations that were going on, I could hear the earliest of all spring frogs outside of the Nunn Winston House, chirping away. I looked over to

Marcia and she quietly mouthed "Spring peepers." She knew of them too. Most people don't. Step outside the next "warm" night this month and listen for these harbingers of spring. Anywhere there are creeks and ponds, standing water will support these mysterious frogs.

Tough Herbs for Tough Landscapes

My wife Cathy and I are both horticulturists by profession. I am always amused when people learn this and say, "I'll bet you have a beautiful landscape." The truth is that when we began raising children 17 years ago, our beautiful collection of house plants and obsession with trees, flowers and shrubs came second to car seats, PTA meetings and baseball games. However, a quick cruise through my landscape will feature only the toughest survivors in the plant kingdom. They can withstand neglect, drought and the occasional trampling during a nighttime game of spotlight.

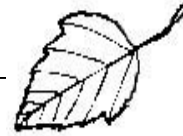
Rosemary, Spearmint and Oregano are my most hardy herbs. The Rosemary was actually rooted from cuttings I took during a Master Gardener propagation class. Upon my announcement that I had not had success in growing this plant, Gita Smith said, "I don't believe I would have told that Chuck, Rosemary is one of the easiest plants you can grow. You can't kill it." When the laughter settled, I was determined to succeed. So there Gita, I just went outside and clipped a couple of sprigs to throw in to a pot of chicken soup. Winter is not so bad.

Betsy Jordan, another Master Gardener, gave me the Spearmint to me several years ago. She has a nice collection of mints; and as I picked leaves and sniffed, I came across one just like my grandmother had growing by her back door. She used it in cooking and flavored iced tea with it. Betsy dug up a hunk of it for me on the spot. Despite keeping it in a container, it has escaped and is creeping up all around my small garden.

The Oregano I have is Greek, I think. It too spreads rapidly and has escaped through the drain hole of its container. Oregano is hardy and makes a nice ground cover. Mine has completed three years and a fire ant invasion in my harsh landscape environment.

I know what Puxatawnee Phil said, "Six more weeks." However, Wilsonville Wilbur (Alabama's version of this weather prognosticator) woke up on February 2 to rainy, stormy weather; therefore, no shadow for Alabama. Let's hope he is right.





Weed Control for Early Spring

By Gita M. Smith

I had the bright idea that I would try killing the weeds around my house before they got a grip on life. All eager to start in early spring, I started reading up on pre-emergence weed killers. The literature is chock-full of detailed information about post-emergence herbicides -- the ones you apply after the weeds are up. But there's very little solid information on the type to use before weeds rear their ugly heads. Mostly, I ran into vague advice like the following: "These weed killers are applied before the weeds sprout, which prevents weed germination while allowing desirable plant growth to continue normally." Well, duh. Even I -- a turf grass dummy -- had that figured.

I did find out from a couple of internet searches that pre-emergence herbicides are usually applied in a granule form, which permeates the soil to about an inch or so. And that they do not kill existing weeds. Plus, you have to worry about ground-feeding birds, like spring robins, disturbing the granules and ingesting them.

I consulted our own Master Gardener Handbook for specific tips on pre-emergence herbicides, and found this helpful fact: "When attempting to control annual weeds, we can treat them prior to weed seed germination with a pre-emergence herbicide treatment.... When treating biennial or perennial weeds, a post-emergence herbicide is the only way to go."

Ahhhh. So now I have to know where on my lawn the annual weeds are lurking, and where lie the perennial weeds. I walked around and scratched the yellowed grasses (mostly weeds) between my house and swimming pool. I realized I had no clue where to apply pre-emergence herbicides. Back to the

drawing board. I decided to go to Lowe's and Home Depot to read product labels. Tip to middle-agers like me: Bring along your reading glasses because the vital information is all in fine print. The three products identified for pre-emergent weed control are as follows:

1. STA-Green Crab-Ex, which comes in a 17-pound bag, lists 20 different weeds of both the grassy and broadleaf type. These are, as expected, annuals. They include crabgrass, goose grass, several spurge and yellow sorrel -- all of which I've identified in my lawn. A bag costs \$11.97 and should be applied at a rate of 3.4 pounds per 1,000 square feet with a drop- or rotary-spreader. It promises four months of weed relief.

2. HALTS Crabgrass preventer (from Scotts) comes in a 13-pound bag and costs \$14.97. Four photos on the front of the bag show crabgrass, foxtail, oxalis and spurge. The label further lists a long list of annual weeds. There's a chart that tells you the rate of application, depending on the type of spreader used. The label warns not to use this product on dichondra or bentgrass lawns.

3. PREEN, which comes in a 5-pound heavy plastic bottle with built-in spreader, costs \$8.97. It is the herbicide of choice. It will cover a minimum of 800 square feet, more if you apply sparingly. This product can be added into mulch or added as you cultivate around rows to prevent dormant weed seeds from germinating.

I like the idea of adding PREEN to the grasses and straws I use for mulching, because last year there were plenty of invisible weed seeds in my mulch. Boy, howdy,

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did they ever germinate when they were disturbed and watered by this gardener.

The directions indicate that Preen should be applied before a rain. Alternatively, one can sprinkle PREEN on top of mulch and immediately water.

In the past, I have waited for weeds to emerge and tried to get them by smothering them under heavy mulch or applying a post-emergent product. That's still an option. But I can't help thinking that a little effort now with a spreader might save me work later, in the hot months, when I'd rather be in the hammock.



Up and Coming Events

Landscape Maintenance Workshop For Homeowners - A landscape maintenance workshop for homeowners is free and open to all at Jeff Clary's home on Feb. 26, 8:30—11:30 AM. The address is 2091 Windway Rd., corner of Ogletree Rd. and Windway in south Auburn. Chuck Browne, Jeff, and extension agents will offer hands-on sessions and answer questions. No registration is needed.

Wrights Mill Road Nature Trail Clean-Up—Feb. 26, 10 AM—1 PM. Contact person—Marcia.gibson@charter.net

Southeastern Flower Show - Presents 'English Gardens for Southern Lifestyles' at the Georgia World Congress Center, Hall A across from the CNN Center from March 2-6, 2005. Advance ticket: \$15 (by March 1, 2005), General admission \$18 (March 2-6, 2005). For more information go to <http://www.flowershow.org/>

2005 State Master Gardener Conference – March 10-12, Gadsden, Alabama.

MGs Needed to Talk at Habitat Workshop - April 7th, Habitat for Humanity workshop for new homeowners. MGs are needed to give basic gardening lessons to these folks. To volunteer, please contact Gita at gitasmith@charter.net

Evie Ratner Herb Sale—April 24, 1—4 PM. 572 Forest Park Circle, Auburn.

Lake Martin Boat Tour —last week of April. Contact Chuck Browne for details.

Citifest – Saturday April 30, 2005 – Lee County Extension along with the Lee County Master Gardeners will have an informational booth during this event. MGs are needed round-the-clock to answer questions, distribute literature and make our presence. Please call or e-mail.

Auburn/Opelika Garden Tour – A group of us had a planning meeting to discuss the viability of organizing a garden tour in our area like the one in Atlanta. We have made up a list of “action items” and we will have a tour if everything comes together. We hope many of you will be able to help – we are looking at the weekend of May 14/15 or May 21/22 at this time. Would you like your garden to be toured? If not, would you like to help during the tours? Please call or e-mail.

Seed Shopping Ideas

A group of Lee County Master Gardeners attended the Jan. 22 Southern Gardening Symposium at Callaway Gardens where we picked up a lot of great information. Here are a few of the plant resources recommended by the experts and speakers at the symposium. Call, write or go online for their catalogs. -- these are the best of the best.

Irises: Sans Souci Nursery (410) 557-0250 or online at www.irises.com (where Dr. Bruce Hornstein cultivates the fabulous irises shown in his lecture). All America Selections, 1311 Butterfield Road, Suite 310, Downer's Grove IL 60515.

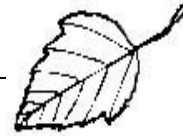
Ball Seed Co., PO Box 355, Chicago IL 60185.
Proven Winners, 550 West State tree Suite D, Sycamore IL 60178,

www.provenwinners.com

Singing Springs Nursery, 8802 Wilkerson Road, Cedar Grove, N.C. 27231,

www.singingspringsnursery.com

Tomato Grower's catalog of heirloom and unusual tomatoes: (888)478-7333



Grafting the Japanese Maple

By William B Shell

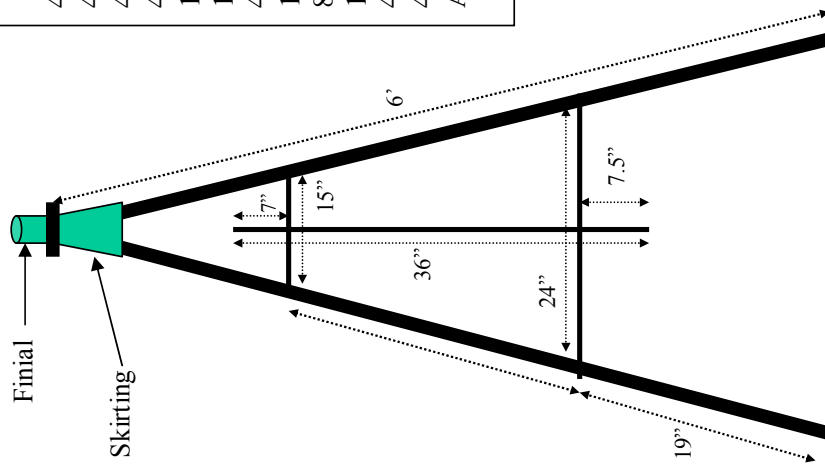
Prior to my wife, Dolores, and I visiting Dr. Gaynor MacDaniel's Japanese gardens here in Auburn in 1996, we had the same five Japanese maples for 30 years. They were of the "red Japanese maple variety." Bingo!... just like that, I was hooked. As we were leaving, Gaynor gave us a beautiful 4-year-old 'Waterfall' in a three gallon container. As you know, 'Waterfall' is a green cascading dissectum that is a real knockout in the fall. Since then I have discovered that there are more than 2,000 cultivars of the Japanese maple and my original five JMs are now about thirty feet tall. At about the same time I discovered Harold Johnston from Tallahassee. He took me under his wing; and then and there I began learning the Japanese maple lore. At the time, Harold had hundreds of JM cultivars and grafted more than 1,000 a year. I spent many hours with Harold, learning to graft and taking many digital photographs of all the cultivars and every phase of the grafting process. I grafted more than 100 other kinds of woody plants before I ever attempted my first JM graft. I was lucky. My hands were meant to graft Japanese maples. I purchased the 1987 edition of Vertrees' Japanese Maples along with Cor van Gelderen's Maples for Gardens and van Gelderen's et al Maples of the World and later, Peter Gregory's 2001 revision of Vertrees 2nd edition. I read each book from cover to cover, only understanding about 1% of what I read. Since then, I use them as reference at least once a week. Hopefully my understanding is now up to 2%.

Getting along with the story...I have a web site essentially devoted to the Japanese maple, "<http://webpages.charter.net/wbshell/garden>." The site includes an outline of how

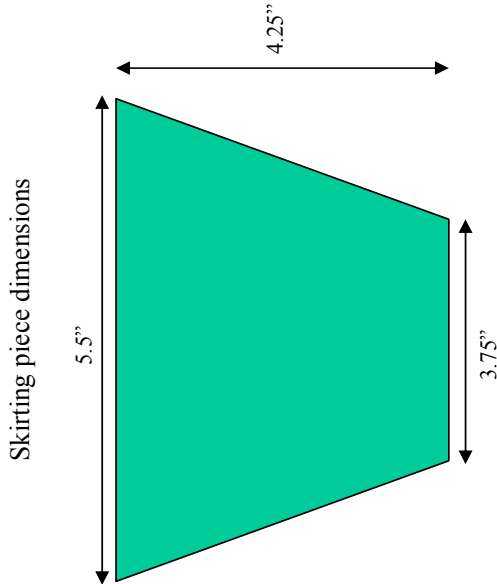
to graft the JM with illustrations of each step. This site has attracted JM viewers from all over the globe. Over the past five years I have received hundreds of questions and comments about the maples, most pertaining to the grafting process. Of course I respond, and if I don't know the answer, I have a host of JM experts at my disposal. I have just added a question and answer section. The site also appears in French, at the request of "un ami de France."

I am certified as a Master Gardener (I have a credential that says so) and many of my friends visit my place frequently and many of them want to learn to graft JMs. Also fellow JM lovers who visit my website and are no more than a few hundred miles away come by and we graft together. I have all the necessary materials. The last workshop I conducted had two enthusiasts from Florida, one from Birmingham and two from Asheville, NC. The procedure goes something like this. I first demonstrate grafting. I will have *Acer palmatum* rootstock in a gallon container and dormant scions that were gathered from my JMs. I graft a nice plump *Seiryu* which is about five inches long with three buds. I make one graft in about a minute. It does look easy, but as many of you know, it really doesn't get easy until you have successfully grafted hundreds of JMs. I then point out each step. Using the veneer (side) grafting technique, I make an initial cut on the side of the rootstock where the scion is to be attached. Graft low for an upright and high (two feet or so) for a laceleaf (dissectum). This cut is never more than a third through the rootstock and about an inch long, leaving a flap. The purpose of this cut is to expose the cambium layer. I then make one inch cuts on the scion, in a wedge shape, forming a point. Next, I place the scion into

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- Parts List for one Obelisk:
- 4 - 2" x 2" x 6'
 - 4 - 2" x 1/2" x 36"
 - 4 - 2" x 1/2" x 24"
 - 4 - 2" x 1/2" x 15"
 - 1 - 5 1/2" x 5 1/2" x 3/4"
 - 1 - Finial
 - 4 - four sided skirting piece for top
 - 16 - 8 x 1 1/2" wood screws
 - 8 - 8 x 1 1/4" wood screws
 - 16 - 7/8 x 17 brads
 - 4 - Coarse 3" drywall screws
 - 4 - plywood pieces for skirting
- Angle for the skirting - about 75°
(template attached)



- Material Required for two obelisks:
- All treated lumber
 - 2" x 6" x 8' - 1 (will make all the 36", 24" and 15" pieces - eight each)
 - 2" x 4" x 12' - 2 (will make all the eight 2" x 2" x 6' pieces)
 - 8 x 1 1/2" wood screws - 32
 - 8 x 1 1/4" wood screws - 16
 - 7/8 x 17 brads - 32
 - 3" coarse drywall screws - 8 (to secure the top bases to the four legs)
 - 12" x 5 1/2" x 3/4" piece - 1 (will make two top bases under the Finial)
 - Finials - 2
 - 6" x 24" plywood piece - 1 (will make 8 skirting pieces)



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the flap on the rootstock, being sure to match the cambium layers on one edge. I then attach the two together using a binding rubber, making sure that the cambium layers are aligned. The binding should be just tight enough to hold the cambium layers firmly. Too tight and you can squeeze the union to death. I then place a poly bag over the scion and tie just below the graft. This keeps the graft and scion moist until callusing takes place, usually in two to five weeks. The grafted plant is placed out of direct sunlight. I place mine in the greenhouse.

It is essential to have a sharp grafting knife. Dull knives mangle the cambium and the rest of the process is moot. Vertrees used a single-edge razor blade, but that doesn't work for me. I use the Tina 605 grafting knife that has a flat edge and the other side angled at about 22 degrees. The flat side is against the scion or rootstock and tends to keep the knife blade from riding out and giving you a cut finger. Control is the name of the game when making the cuts. The binding rubbers are 3/8 inch wide and about 5 inches long and very flexible. The poly bag is 6 inches by 2 inches and about 2 mil thick. I have a hand-out available with a bibliography and a list of suppliers.

When beginning the hands-on portion, the enthusiasts practice making the tie with the binding rubber, practicing on whatever is available in the gardens. If they aren't fairly adept at binding the scion and the rootstock, the cambium match will be knocked askew and no union will take place.

Once they develop some skill in this, they practice making the cuts. After a bit of proficiency is developed, they are ready to graft the *Acer palmatum* rootstock and scions. As we work along, I point out that the rootstock and scions must be compatible. For instance, you would not want to graft a *buergernium* scion onto *palmatum* rootstock. They just aren't compatible. Also, a beginning JM grafter should not expect a high percentage of grafts to take. As his/her proficiency increases so will the success rate. A bonsai enthusiast might want to graft a *dissectum* low on the rootstock as suggested by van Gelderen, and then stake a limb and make that the main trunk. That way you can cover the union with mulch and it will not be visible.

Following the completion of this portion of the workshop, we break for a delicious lunch prepared by my wife and walk my gardens and look at the hundreds of Japanese maples on the grounds. As we stroll, we drop by my small gazebo where we find a cache of cool wine and stout. Makes the walk even more pleasant. Many questions arise and I have included most of them on the website. The good news is, all that we have covered is contained on the website, along with a bibliography and list of suppliers. Much camaraderie has developed and all it has cost the participants is their time and sharing of their joy. I am a retired teacher/professor and nothing gives me more pleasure than to have people learn and feel their efforts were well spent. So you see, it is a real win-win situation!



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