

FLOWER GARDENS SPEAK VOLUMES

Listening is part of the fun

By Katherine Stickroth
Special to the Chieftain

With snow showers and sunshine wrestling over which will dominate the growing season in Wallowa County, anxious gardeners perform a “dash and dig” dance, taking advantage of any dry moments to prepare the soil and to plant.

Flower gardens, planted for the simple pleasure of natural beauty, hold as much attention as vegetable gardens necessary to feed the family.

A group consisting of gardeners from throughout



Tulips are among some of the first flowers to make their appearance in Wallowa.

Wallowa County resumed its meetings in May and meets the second Tuesday of the month at 2 p.m. through September.

Though they bear no official name, they gather to discuss current growing conditions, such as weather and moisture in the soil.

Reconnecting with other gardeners after a hard winter with lively conversations on planned planting makes the social aspect of gardening evident. They discuss a plant exchange where “starts” — perennials that begin appearing in early spring and are easily transplanted — are shared with an explanation of the requirements for successful growth.

Deer-proofing a garden is a major topic. Daffodils, irises, herbs and cosmos are of little interest to deer. For other flowers, deer repellent spray from local hardware stores is suggested as the most common means of protection. Tall fencing is the premier option.

“Another choice is planting chives or garlic within the



Photos by Katherine Stickroth/Special to the Chieftain
Gwen Menton spends considerable time in her backyard potting shed when spring begins its arrival.

flower bed,” a member adds. “The unpleasant smell can drive deer away.” Homemade recipes for “stinky repellents” are also passed around.

Throwing dead plants to the chickens and composting are brought up. Another fun activity at these garden meetings is sharing ideas for water features and potting sheds. An exchange of seeds and garden books are planned for this year’s events.

The meetings end with a chatty time of enjoying the

host’s garden.

This garden group’s summer 2017 meeting schedule includes visits to member gardens in Wallowa, Enterprise and Joseph. The group is open to membership, and interested individuals may contact Gwen Merton 541-432-5201 for more information. There are no dues for membership.

For a newcomer, this garden group is an excellent way to meet new people and discover the unique planting conditions in Wallowa County.



Evelyn Swart is an experienced gardener, but occasionally she uses reference books for proper horticultural requirements.

Seasoned individual gardeners who have developed their own gardening style exhibit a natural touch when growing things.

Retired educator Evelyn Swart anticipates the melting of snow and access to her flower beds. She enjoys the passersby who admire her flowers.

“I enjoy splashes of color when planting,” she said. “I create groupings of yellow daffodils and red poppies as well as beds with roses and peonies.

“When I was around 10 years old, I had a garden for 4-H in Fruitland, Idaho. In college, I took a course in home flower gardening as a fill-in class.”

Swart did not have the opportunity for gardening until retirement. She uses several reference books, especially The American Horticulture Society A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants.

The common language of flowers crosses all barriers among growers. Ron Pickens, a part-time delivery man from Enterprise Flowers, stopped at Swart’s recently and after introductions, it was discovered that Ron has work experience growing cut flowers in the eastern United States.

“I plant to have flowers throughout the growing season,” says Swart. “Tulips and daffodils are for May. June holds peonies, irises and poppies. July continues the poppies. August brings wild geraniums, coral bells and dahlias as big as dinner plates.”

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