

**A Source for  
Becoming an  
Informed Gardener**  
-- A Summary of the  
Work of  
Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott

*Susan Strauss,  
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Recently, I took advantage of a discount offered in a magazine for the course, *The Science of Gardening*, taught by Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott. This 24-lecture course introduced me to the work of Dr. Chalker-Scott. As I watched and listened to the series, I became an instant fan. Dr. Chalker-Scott is an Extension Specialist in Urban Horticulture and an Associate Professor of Horticulture at Washington State University. The emphasis in all her work is disseminating horticulture information backed by scientific research. Through her books and on-line blog, <http://gardenprofessors.com>, she acts as a myth buster for numerous gardening questions.

Master Gardeners are always seeking information on a multitude of subjects. It is hard for us to "know everything." To help us in our quest, I would highly recommend the two books written by Dr. Chalker-Scott, *The Informed Gardener*, University of Washington Press, 2008, and the *Informed Gardener Blooms Again*, University of Washington Press, 2010. Both of these books cover many horticultural topics and are very easy to read. Each chapter takes a specific topic, explains the myth surrounding that topic, and then goes on to explain what the reality of the myth really is. She concludes every topic with a summary that she calls "The Bottom Line" and then cites her list of references. Each chapter is set up this way and is succinct and to the point.

There are many subjects covered in the two

books, and not all are of interest to every Master Gardener. The first myth covered in the first book is, "If it's published, it must be true." This is a problem that Master Gardeners confront all the time. Dr. Chalker-Scott uses as an example the book, *The Sound of Music and Plants*, which she says is cited by dozens of Web sites as solid scientific evidence that classical music benefits plant growth, while acid rock has a negative effect. In the Reality section of this chapter, Dr. Chalker-Scott analyzes this publication for its scientific merit and details why she thinks it comes up short. She uses this example to show us that we must be careful about what we accept as information backed by scientific research.

Some of the myths that are explained in *The Informed Gardener* that might be of interest to Master Gardeners are:

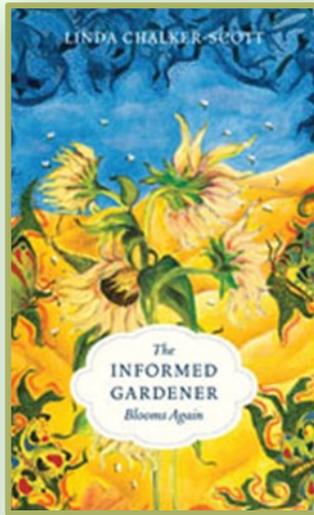
- 1—"Organic products are safer than chemicals."
- 2—"You shouldn't disturb the root ball when transplanting trees and shrubs."
- 3—"How hard can it be to stick a plant in the ground?"
- 4—"Garden plants do not become invasive."
- 5—"Balled and burlapped root balls must be left intact during transplanting."
- 6—"Newly planted trees should be staked firmly and securely."

This is just a sampling of the questions answered in *The Informed Gardener*. Dr. Chalker-Scott continues in *The Informed Gardener Blooms Again* with more topics such as;

- 1—"The Myth of Chloroxed Clippers"
- 2—"Adding Epsom salts to gardens is a safe, natural way to increase plant growth."
- 3—"The Myth of Gypsum Magic"
- 4—"The Myth of Allelopathic Wood Chips"

Also, in *The Informed Gardener Blooms Again*, Dr. Chalker-Scott inserts a few pages to cover important topics like:

- How to Avoid Phosphate Overloads in Your Landscape
- Why Weeds Will Always Be in Your Garden
- What's Wrong with My Plants: An Initial Guide to Diagnosis



The topics covered in both books sometimes lend themselves to vegetable gardening, but most of the advice is meant for landscape gardening. At times, Dr. Chalker-Scott can get a bit technical in her explanations, but, in general, these books are very easy to read and to absorb. Both books are available in Cuyahoga County libraries. Many Cuyahoga County Master Gardeners are already familiar with Dr. Chalker-Scott's work. Through her books and her blog, it is possible to extend our knowledge in the pursuit of scientifically based information.

Dear Reader:

*I was recently in England and, for the first time, I saw this amazing plant in bloom. It is a Ceanothus and can be a tree or large shrub. In the U.S., it is native to California and is often called a California Lilac. Even though we can't grow it, I wanted to share this lovely plant with you.*

*Sandy Welches, Editor*

*California Lilacs, or Ceanothus, are some of our most fragrant and colorful shrubs in California. They are also evergreen and very drought tolerant.*

