

Our *Amelanchier alnifolia* is in full bloom so I know spring is officially here. Another sign of spring is the abundance of birds in our garden. I wish our flickers were in our garden and not so attached to the side of our house (literally). Here's one more installment in the continuing flicker saga. My husband and I think perhaps it wasn't such a smart idea to mount the flicker house on the side of our home. Especially since it's on the outside wall of our bedroom.

Mr. Flicker is not only hammering away at his own home, he's chipping and shredding his way all along the vent-board that runs under our eaves. And when his little birdlings hatch out I'm afraid he'll start teaching them how to hammer and chip away. So hopefully all of you who asked for the directions for the flicker birdhouse had enough forethought to mount your birdhouses on a more suitable place far away from your home.

Our flicker pair has been working away on the side of our home for about four years now so we mounted the birdhouse in an act of desperation. Although we're excited that they might soon become a mom and dad with birdlets to raise. We just have to figure out a way to entice them to another abode next year.

We're thinking about putting up netting after they vacate their home for the summer. I also recently read about fastening mylar strips or even used CDs hung from fish line all along the roofline. All of these methods are supposed to discourage the flickers from attempting to excavate a home on the side of your house.

In the meantime we're learning about these intriguing, useful and quite beautiful birds. A superb site to find out about all birds is www.birds.cornell.edu. I went to the site to find out about flicker fledglings. I highly recommend the Cornell site. You can find details and even hear birdsongs for hundreds of birds.

But I'm digressing, here's more flicker lore. Flickers are monogamous and bond for life. Both the male and female defend their territory. So it's not only Mr. Flicker drumming away, he has help. As soon as the eggs are laid they'll curtail their drumming. Eggs are semi-glossy and pure white. Mrs. Flicker will lay one egg per day until there are five to eight eggs. (Now I know why the birdhouse had to be so big.)

It will take eleven to fourteen days and incubation begins before she lays the last egg. Both the male and female incubate the eggs. According to Cornell, our female will lose interest in the eggs and our male will continue to tend the eggs, especially at night. The baby birds hatch out within one or two days of each other. Then the parents begin searching for ants, beetles, wasps, caterpillars and any other insect larva they can find. (Hey, maybe that's why this time every year some of the ants try to make their way into our house.)

The mom and dad regurgitate the food to feed the babies inside the nest. After three weeks the young start climbing out onto the house to greet their parents when they return with food. After 24 to 28 days the parents lure the fledglings away from the nest by withholding food and calling to them. Once the fledglings leave the nest, they don't return. Their parents watch over them and still feed and protect them for two to three more weeks. And, dear readers, the best part is the adults don't come back either. Until next year that is. And we'll be ready for them, with our mylar, netting and a birdhouse mounted farther away from the side of our house.

Now that gardening season is officially upon us here's the locations for the Master Gardener Plant Diagnostic Clinics: Port Orchard Farmer's Market, Port Orchard Nursery, Lowe's, Bremerton Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Poulsbo Market Thriftway, Central Market (Poulsbo), Bainbridge Hardware, Winslow Farmer's Market, and Kingston Farmer's Market. Clinics run from mid-April through mid-September each year. Clinics are held on either Thursday or Saturday depending on the location.

Last year I wrote an article about Gardenscapes in Port Orchard. Owners Sue and Marilyn have restructured their business and will now only be open from March 31 through May 27 this year. They'll continue to offer design services (by appointment) and their extremely popular Victoria Hanging Basket classes. But now you'll find everything else online at www.egardenscapes.com. Victoria Hanging Basket Workshops this year are 1-3 p.m. on April 25, May 5 and 6, and May 10 and 11. Cost is \$48. Call 360-871-7245 for reservations.

Contact Peg with comments or questions in care of this newspaper or at gardenmentor@yahoo.com