

Iowa County Master Gardener Newsletter - March 2006

Happy Spring ICMG's! Well, happy almost spring...

The weather has been so beautiful the last few days I was able to get outside and do some of the clean up I didn't do last fall. I've found tiny daffodils and early tulips poking through the mulch already and some of the perennials are showing signs of life. Now, as I listen to the thunder and put together the next issue of our newsletter, I'm thinking that spring isn't too far away. I'm sure I'll snap back to reality with the way this week's forecast is sounding.

I hope you were able to enjoy the nice weather as I have!

Happy Gardening!

Brenda

February 22, 2006 Meeting Minutes

7 PM Stonefield Apartments

In attendance: Pat Borcharding (President), Tami Bowser (Vice President), Linda Lynch (Treasurer), Virginia Mundt (Secretary), Karen Crawford (Liaison), Brenda Walter (Newsletter Editor), Rhonda Gildersleeve (Advisor), Denise Marino, Verna and Tom Pilling, Mary Mayo, Jayne Wisler, Diane Bober, Maureen Fitzgibbon, Vicki, Stangel, Roger Reynolds.

Treasurer's Report – Treasurer Linda Lynch reported a balance of \$4030.04. Motion made by Virginia Mundt, second by Maureen Fitzgibbon to accept the treasurer's report. Motion carried.

President Pat Borcharding introduced MG intern Carol Rademaker.

Refreshment volunteers for the May 24, 2006 meeting are Maureen Fitzgibbon, Verna Pilling and Denise Marino.

Brenda Walter reported she had contacted Fiskars about the tool grant program. They request a detailed report and pictures. Brenda suggested we work on the grant application for next year due to the early deadline and paperwork it requires.

President, Pat Borcharding talked with David Blume concerning getting water to the vegetable garden. He suggested a water line and 3 spigots at a cost of \$125. Discussion followed.

Tools needed for Bloomfield garden plot were discussed. Jayne Wisler moved we spend \$300, second by Karen Crawford, motion carried. The following tools were suggested: 5-tine fork, 2 small shovels, 1 round mouth shovel, 1 potato fork, large shears, diamond hoe.

Many unusual tools can be found at McFarland's, Middleton Co-op, and Ganzers.

Discussion concerning a gravel ramp leading up to the new shed for ease in storing large garden equipment. Karen Crawford moved we do this, Maureen Fitzgibbon seconded, motion carried.

By-law Committee – Brenda Walter and Mary Mayo gave out proposed by-law revisions. We discussed half of them and will meet March 22, 2006 at 7 PM at Stonefield to discuss the remaining proposed changes. Motion by Roger Reynolds, second by Jayne Wisler, motion carried.

Correction to last newsletter: Dues are to be sent to the current Vice President, Tami Bowser.

Denise Marino reported on “Year of the Child Garden Program/Planting”. She spoke on the options at Dodgeville Library. It was suggested we participate with Folklore Village in their summer classes program which is already in place and advertised. Denise suggested a book “Gardening Wizardry for Kids” for kids’ garden projects.

Linda Lynch suggested a committee to decide what projects determine the budget. It was moved by Karen Crawford, second by Jayne Wisler to spend \$500 for supplies, such as mulch, plants, seeds, at Bloomfield. Motion carried.

Karen & Phil Crawford volunteered to attend the State Master Gardener Association convention March 24 and 25, 2006 in place of the President, for a cost of \$156 plus mileage. Vicki Stangel made the motion, Brenda Walter second. Motion carried.

There were no volunteers to attend the district meeting in Janesville on April 8, 2006.

The state MG Association recommends mentors for the MG interns. We have 16 interns. Linda Lynch and Roger Reynolds volunteered as mentors.

The Bloomfield Garden site coordinator discussion was tabled.

The President reported the state MG Association was asking for silent auction donations and also to sell raffle tickets. Karen Crawford moved we send \$50, second by Roger Reynolds and motion carried. Vicki Stangel volunteered to donate a painted garden tool for the silent auction.

A receipt of \$43.10 was presented by Pat Borcharding for refreshment supplies. Karen Crawford moved to pay the bill, second by Mary Mayo. Motion carried.

Roger Reynolds asked members if they would support the Harris Park rain garden project. Mary Mayo made the motion to support it, second by Jayne Wisler. Motion carried. Sheet passed around for donation of plants and planting help.

Motion to adjourn made by Virginia Mundt, second by Tami Bowser. Motion carried.

Roger Reynolds gave a program about the 2006 Harris Park rain garden project.

Respectfully Submitted,
Virginia Mundt

From Phil and Karen Crawford –

April 8th Bus Trip

Leave Mineral Point from the Alliant Energy Center Parking Lot at 7:30AM sharp. It is about a 3 1/2 hour ride to Garfield Park Conservatory. Should arrive about 11:00AM. We will depart for Gethsemane at 1:30PM which is about a 40 minute journey--arriving at about 2:15PM.

We will leave Gethsemane 3:30. The times depend somewhat on the weather.

The Conservatory and most of the garden center are under cover. The Garfield market and Andersonville area are open air. We will be arriving back in Mineral Point before 7:00PM. Bring your own lunch and refreshments for the day. There will be opportunities to purchase snacks at Garfield and Gethsemane.

I would like to receive checks as soon as possible from all who have committed for the trip. Ask a friend or family to join us. At this time we have extra seats.

Plant A Row For the Hungry

The Iowa County Hunger Task Force invites you to share the abundance of your garden with your neighbors in Iowa County.

Here's how:

- ❖ Plant an extra row in your garden this year.
- ❖ Bring this extra produce to one of the many drop-off sites in Iowa County. Watch your local papers for drop-off sites.

The Plant A Row for the Hungry campaign was started by Garden Writers of America. Since it started in 1995, gardeners in the U.S. and Canada have delivered almost 8 million pounds of fresh vegetables, fruits and herbs to food banks and soup kitchens serving the hungry. What a wonderful “home-grown” solution to increasing demands at our local food pantries.

For more information, contact Donna Peterson at UW-Extension, 935-0391 or Amy Graber at Southwest CAP, 935-2326.

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And here are a couple of articles of interest.

It may be cold out, but now's a great time to plan planting

Sunday, January 29, 2006

Special to the Gazette

There's something to be said about flipping through the colorful pages of a flower or vegetable catalog in the middle of winter.

Spring and summer don't seem that far away when you let your eyes absorb the vivid colors of lavender plants and vine-ripened tomatoes.

Taking the time now to browse seed and plant catalogs and to do a little research into both plant materials and landscape options for your yard can be invaluable, local experts say, for creating a knockout yard and garden.

According to Emelee Rajzer, consumer-horticulture expert and former Master Gardener Program coordinator for the Michigan State University Extension program in Kalamazoo County, the time from February through April can actually be an active period for homeowners who garden and want to improve their landscaping.

Gardeners who order seed and plant catalogs already have them by February, she said. Although that's too early to order and get plants, it's a great time to browse and to do research on plants that are right for this growing region and for the gardener's own yard.

Look back and learn

Rajzer also considers winter to be a good time to reflect on the previous growing season.

"Last year was a very challenging year for the gardener," she said.

Rajzer said the dry spring, followed by a wet period and then a long, hot summer was not ideal for yards and gardens.

"A lot of plants anguished," she said.

Rajzer recommends using the winter to review any gardening notes or journals. Short of notes, now is a good time to think back to the summer and analyze what worked and what didn't.

If the ground isn't covered in snow, gardeners can also do basic marking-out of areas they plan to landscape or use as garden or flower beds. Rajzer

recommends using empty containers -- each marked with names of plants -- to plot planting. The containers can be moved easily to create different planting schemes; they will also give the gardener an idea of how many plants will be needed to fill an area -- which is helpful when ordering from catalogs or when buying at greenhouses in the spring.

Don't jump the gun

Ben Yost, owner of Farm N Garden, 1003 Staples Ave., agrees with Rajzer.

Winter, he said, "is a good idea to plan ahead."

"It's a great time to sit down and retrospect, because a person forgets by spring."

At many yard-and-garden stores, fertilizer and grass seed are already on the shelves. Yard equipment, such as lawn mowers, is also stocked well before the first day of spring.

Yost said that by looking at products now, homeowners have ample time to ask questions about yard problems before it's actually time to fertilize and reseed.

In reality, Yost said, most homeowners wait until the first 60-degree day to start thinking about their yards and gardens. Yet as long as the ground isn't frozen, spring bulbs can be planted during the winter, he said.

That's the only planting, though, that Luba Schram, of Schram's Greenhouse, 7313 S. Westnedge Ave., recommends doing before the ground temperature gets to be at least 65 degrees (many seed varieties need at least a 60-degree ground temperature to germinate).

Once the weather breaks in early spring, some gardeners get anxious.

"We've had customers come find us in the greenhouse in March," Schram said. But one of the biggest gardening mistakes is to start seeds too early. Setting plants outdoors too soon, before the ground is warm enough, is another common mistake.

"They (home gardeners) get antsy and want to start the plant themselves and don't read the directions," she said.

Explore possibilities

In late winter, gardeners can, however, call greenhouses to find out what new plants they may be carrying for the spring, Schram said. Those who call early

can at least know what plants will be available and which ones gardeners might have to start themselves indoors.

Jonathan Hoffman, owner of The Garden Path in Vicksburg and an Extension-trained master gardener, said he views winter as an optimal time for homeowners to do in-depth research on plants and create designs for their outdoor living spaces.

“It's a good time to dream about what you want in your landscape,” Hoffman said.

One of Hoffman's favorite print resources is *Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs*, by Michael A. Dirr. He considers the 400-plus-page book to be the bible for anyone who wants to create an effective landscape that includes interest for all four seasons of the year. Using plants like redwood dogwood and grasses, as well as unusual perennials like winter-blossoming witch hazel, are among approaches Dirr recommends.

Winter and early spring are also good times to attend seminars and home expos on gardening and landscaping and to join a garden club. Getting a soil test is another chore that can be done before spring, as long as the soil collected isn't too wet, Hoffman said.

Spending the time to research plants to learn what they offer, when they bloom and for how long and how big they will get helps before going to greenhouses and nurseries to make purchases.

Gardeners should create lists of the plant varieties they want so they won't be overwhelmed, Hoffman said.

Knowledge yields success

Schram agreed that the homeowners who are the most successful with their yards and gardens are the ones who know something about the plants they're buying and which ones will thrive in the conditions around their homes. For example, vegetables generally need at least six hours of direct sunlight, she said. So if your back yard is filled with shade trees, a garden would not be the best thing to plant in the space, Schram also recommends using catalogs, books and gardening Web sites to see what plants look like.

“They (catalogs) are a wonderful place to get an idea of what to do,” she said.

Lining up local landscapers is another task that can be done in the winter.

“By the time you get to April or May, everybody has thought about it (landscaping), so there's a longer waiting period,” said Dave DeVisser, owner of

DeVisser Landscape Service, 4014 S. 9th St. "As soon as people see their lawns, they call."

Normally the design process, which includes looking at the site, measuring it and creating the design, can take anywhere from four to eight weeks.

Having a landscape plan done in February or March also allows time to get several bids.

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Tropical cannas, elephant ears are back in vogue

Sunday, February 05, 2006

By John Hogan
The Grand Rapids Press

Adding tropical flare to Michigan gardens long has been the work of cannas, a once-popular plant in Victorian gardens that fell out of favor in the 20th century due to limited selection.

Depending upon variety, you can find cannas that grow from 2 to 6 feet, flower in red, orange, pink, yellow and cream and offer foliage in shades of green and bronze.

The operative word here is "find." Southern growers were hammered by a cool, wet spring followed by a hot, dry summer, which took its toll on rhizomes shipped to nurseries and growers nationwide.

Canna growers in Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas were delayed getting rhizomes planted last year due to cool, damp conditions.

"Plants you'd see sprouting up in a few days took weeks," said Kit Steinaway, a vice president in charge of bulbs at Old House Gardens in Ann Arbor.

"Anytime you plant a bulb in cool, damp soil you run the risk it is going to rot," she said. "This was followed by drought, so the ones that did come up were hit. Everything that could go wrong, did go wrong."

A noted cheerleader of the canna is Scott Kunst, who runs Old House Gardens, which is dedicated to ensuring the best of old-time plants remain in cultivation. He still is cheering the canna, but suggests die-hard fans buy early.

"We keep adjusting our projections, and it is clear we are going to sell out," Kunst said. "We were pretty stunned when we started calling around and everyone had the same lament."

Unless you dug up canna rhizomes last fall to reuse this year, you might want to grab what you can as soon as cannas hit the shelves at garden supply centers. Or, you can take a page from David Francko's book, and take a walk on the wild side.

Topical tropicals

Francko is the guy who says you can grow palms, banana plants and other tropical fare in Michigan. Not in the house, but outdoors.

Not everyone has the nerve, or the budget, to substitute cannas with a Japanese fiber banana. Besides, the bananas are inedible.

You still can have tropical flair without taxing your budget. A personal favorite is the mighty elephant ear (*Colocasia esculenta*). It, like canna, has moved beyond the days when gardening snobs looked down their pretentious noses at these admittedly unusual plants. As recently as 1990, they were lumped into the same category as pink lawn flamingoes, Kunst said.

"I love elephant ears," he said. "I've grown them 20 years in my own yard and, typically, they are pretty happy. Tastes change, and people give them a second look."

The plant is named for large, green leaves resembling Dumbo's floppy ears, not those served at carnival food booths.

"Black magic elephant ear has chartreuse veins through the charcoal-colored leaves," Kunst said. "In the last two or three years, it is showing up at the mass-market garden centers -- the horticultural assembly line.

"They've gone from scorn to a celebrated place in the market."

Drink deep

Michigan gardeners too often underestimate this plant's voracious thirst and appetite. Like canna, elephant ears enjoy water and plenty of fertilizer.

"A programmed lawn sprinkler is not adequate for a plant that wants to grow 5 feet," Kunst said. "You need to give it more nutrition and more water."

If this sounds intimidating, Kunst has a suggestion: Plant them in a container a foot across and sink it into the ground. Plastic containers used by tree nurseries are ideal.

"Planting it in a bucket does the trick," Kunst said. "You can even cut the bottom out of it. Leave enough room to fill it with a couple inches of water; that way you don't have to flood the entire garden."

If you are going to plant it directly into the soil, wait until Memorial Day weekend.

"If you try to rush it, they get chilled," Kunst said. "They never seem to catch up or get started."

Mother Nature provided a glaring example of this in the canna fields of Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas.

Treat elephant ears similarly, and you may have to settle for ones that come deep fried and sprinkled with cinnamon.