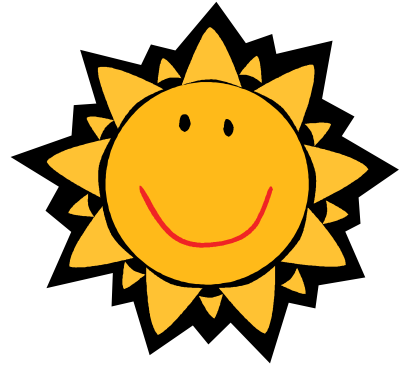


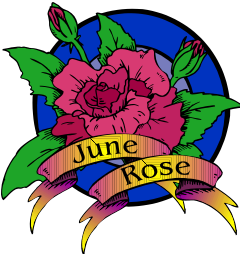
# Roots & Shoots



Master Gardener  
Society of  
Oakland County, Inc.



## June – July 2014

	<p>June 10, 2014 @ 6:30pm MGSOC General Society Meeting &amp; Location Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church 5631 North Adams Rd, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304</p> <p>Speaker : Cheryl English Education: "Species and Small Flowering Clematis"</p> <p>A business meeting will take place, prior to the start of our Educational Program.</p>
	<p>July 15, 2014 @ 6:30pm MGSOC General Society Meeting &amp; Location Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church 5631 North Adams Rd, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304</p> <p>Speaker : James Rizzo Education: "Creating Living Walls"</p> <p>A business meeting will take place, prior to the start of our Educational Program.</p>
	<p>August 12, 2014 @ 6:30pm MGSOC General Society Meeting &amp; Location Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church 5631 North Adams Rd, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304</p> <p>Speaker : Janet Macunovich Education: "Choosing and Planting Trees"</p> <p>A business meeting will take place, prior to the start of our Educational Program.</p>

## Carol's Corner



By the time you read this, the annual Recognition Banquet will be a pleasant memory. 113 people attended the dinner at White Lake Oaks Country Club. Our theme this year was ***Taking Flight with the Monarchs***. Our give-away this year were milkweed plants to encourage all to plant for the Monarchs.

There were 56 Basic Certifications awarded, 40 Advanced Certificates, 39-250 Hours Pins, 18-500 Hours Pins, 11-1000 Hours Pins, 1-1500 Hours Pin, 2-2000 Hours Pins, and 2-2500 Hours Pins! All who attended were given their Certificates/Pins in person. We mailed the rest to all the Honorees. Congratulations to all of you and thank you for your service! There's a list of the honorees in this issue of *Roots & Shoots*.



### **Master Gardener of the Year was awarded to Julie Kowalk!**

Julie took the training class in 2000 and has taken leadership roles on many projects. She started volunteering at Bower Farm and the Southfield Senior Community Garden. For many years she was the Treasurer of the Master Gardener Society of Oakland County. She has also been volunteering for many years “behind the scenes” on membership and elections for the Society. Though she has a big full-time job, she always offers to help others, even during her busiest seasons. No matter what the latest challenge is, she meets it head on with a smile and gentle demeanor. I hope you all take the time to congratulate Julie on her very much deserved honor the next time you see her.

I also want to recognize and thank the Banquet Committee. This hard working committee consists of Corrinne Anderson, Emily Banks, Kay Kisell, Maria Sayre, Jan Stephens, Linda Wilcher, and Claudia York. They take charge of this event and are responsible for the great door prizes, centerpieces, etc.

On another note, we are having an information table at the Lathrup Village Farmers Market this year. The market is on Wednesdays, and our table will be staffed from 2:00pm-6:00pm. I hope all of you who like staffing the farmers market information booths will try this market!

Now that the volunteer season has kicked off, please remember to wear your Master Gardener name badge to any projects that you are submitting volunteer hours for. Also do not endorse specific products or companies. If you don't know the answer to a question, please refer them to our Garden Hotline at 248-858-0902.

The next big event is Master Gardener College on Campus on June 20/21. In case you missed the email notice, you can find the link to register at <http://mg.msue.msu.edu/>. It's a great way to get your educational credits done and meet Master Gardeners from all over Michigan. I hope to see you there!

It finally feels like spring/summer! Wishing you all a great gardening season. I hope all your gardens grow beautifully and you make new friends amongst our Oakland County Master Gardener family and the groups we serve.

## **2014 Oakland County MSUE Master Gardener Recognition Banquet Honorees**

### **Basic Certifications**

Emily Banks, Patricia Beck, Michelle Benitah, Robin Biebuyck, Suzanne Bielski-Grifor, Mariemma Brown, Beth Burnett, Crystal Castle, Donna Crawley, Joyce Dallas, Debra Dettling, Helen Dokey, Judy Donovan, Maureen Frey, Harry Green, Debra Hayden-Schmid, Cynthia Howard, Beverly Hydo, Carol Kalinski, Keith Kama, Debra Kearney, MaryLou Kondrat, Elizabeth Kreston, Sabrina Kudzia, Martha Larsh, Virginia Lavender, Brian Louwers, Jennifer Louwers, Debra Lueder, Diana McCrudden, Mary Ann McDermott, Timothy McGee, William Miller, Anna Moore, Jeannine Moreland, Wanda Morrison, Janet Mutz, Donna Nahajewski, Donna Olsen, Barbara Osher, Joyce Peck, Suzanne Phillips, Marsha Rafferty, Lindsey Reid, Karen Rizik, Jacqueline Roehl, Maria Sayre, Carol Scheuer, Kristie Schwarz, Joann Serr, Brenda Shetterley, Eddie Sullivan, Kimberly Taylor, Lisa Uchno, Donna Weber, Brenda Winowiecki, Joy Wolfe, Judy Workings, Mary Zahrt

### **Advanced Certifications**

Beth Anthony, Mariemma Brown, Crystal Castle, Ellen Crowley, Marilyn Dailey, John Erich, Annette Ferris, Maureen Frey, Julie Fromm, Paula Geiman, Adine Golemba, Mary Ann Guerriero, Elizabeth Howcroft, Debra Knight, Kathleen Kurdziel, Martha Larsh, Virginia Lavender, Daniel Mackler, Dorothy McLaren, Stevie Morris, Donna Olsen, Suzanne Phillips, Russell Propst, Elizabeth Reardon, Marilyn Rice, Maria Richie, Sharon Schafer, Katherine Schmitt, Glenn Shepard, Angela Sheperd, Brenda Shetterley, Diane Smith, Diane Steslicki, Nancy Taylor, Sally Teague, John Turchin, Gail Webster, Joy Wolfe, Cynthia Zemaitis, Ellen Zimmerman

### **250 Hours Pins**

Katherine Barker, Edward Blondin, Mary Bohner, Carol Brantley, Kathleen Brooks, Janina Ceglarek, Lucy Lavon Cook, Christina Cunniffie, Marilyn Cunningham, RoseMary Curatolo, Diane Cusumano, Robert Denver, Carol Ebner, John Erich, John Garbacik, Anne Hargrave-Thomas, Christine Harris, Barbara Houchins, Sandra

Kondos, Sandra Laurence, Susan Libertiny, Charlene McLeod, Renee Michalek, Neda Patton-Sapp, Jennifer Perkins, Elizabeth Peters, Suzanne Phillips, Bonnie Pioch, Lucy Propst, Susan Sajdak, Brenda Shetterley, Gerald Spezia, Gayle Spiteri, Nancy Strodl, Melinda Thomas, John VanDerAue, Betsy Wilds, Joy Wolfe, Linda Yolkiewicz

### **500 Hours Pins**

Patricia Baum, Carole Carroll, Carol Ewing, Sharon Hall, Deborah Heilbrun, Colleen McInerney, Janice McNulty, Charlene Molnar, AnnMarie Monette, Joan Morgan, Glen Morningstar Jr, Catherine Nanney, Ruth Parulis, Claire Pryor, Carla Spradlin, Catherine Stedman, Janet Stephens, Susan Waldecker

### **1000 Hours Pins**

Stephanie Abate, Denise Brown, Meg Costantini, Barbara Donahue, MaryLynne Echlin, Joan Harbaugh, Mary Hrynik, Lana Jerome, Stephanie Patil, William Pioch, Gail Reading

### **1500 Hours Pin**

Judy Jacobs

### **2000 Hours Pins**

Mary Schwark, Margaret Truza

### **2500 Hours Pins**

Bonna Cathey, Eric Ulin

### **Master Gardener of the Year**

Julie Kowalk

## Historical Master Gardener of the Year Recipients

1991 Joan Monforton

2002 Ruth Vrbensky

1992 Lou Ann Goldblatt

2004 William F. Pioch III

1993 Janet Macunovich

2004 Terry Ohrstrom

1994 Nancy Paggi

2005 Ruth Parulis

1995 Robert Mrozek

2006 Clay E. Ottoni

1996 Jeanine Gunasekaran

2007 Barb Near

1996 Sue Hickcox

2008 Priscilla Needle

1997 Donna Mrozek

2009 Wayne Lapinski

1998 Denise Jones

2010 Susan Tatus McLarty

1999 Sylvia Schult

2011 Denise Brown

2000 Robert McGowan

2012 Margy Truza

2001 Craig Smith

2013 Julie Kowalk

2002 John Humphrey

## ***The Year at a Glance—MGSOC Meetings/Events for 2014***

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June 5 - 8		Bus Trip to St. Louis, MO	
June 10	Cheryl English	Species and Small Flowering Clematis	
July 15	James Rizzo	Creating Living Walls	
August 12	Janet Macunovich	Choosing and Planting Trees	
August 18		MGSOC Board Meeting	7PM @ Extension Office
September 9	Molly Robinson	Decorating with Molly	
October 14	Sue Grubba	Shady Characters in the Garden	
October 20		MGSOC Board Meeting	7PM @ Extension Office
November 11	Julia Hofley	Take Back Your Garden and Protecting Your Investment	
November 17		MGSOC Board Meeting	7PM @ Extension Office
December 9	Holiday Potluck		

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*...from the cabbage patch*

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everyone.

Please remember to notify our Corresponding Secretary, Nancy Schmid, with member news so she can forward the appropriate correspondence to our fellow Master Gardeners. As corresponding secretary, Nancy sends cards of cheer, congratulations and condolences to our members as the situation warrants and Nancy would welcome being alerted to any such opportunities. She would also appreciate knowing whether or not the member wishes to share their news with

Nancy has been a Master Gardener since 2010 as well as a member of the Project Support Team since then. Nancy is also the keeper of the Master Gardener cookbooks so please keep her in mind if you have news to share or need a gift for gardener.

Contact Nancy at 248.651.7639 or 586.662.9394 (cell) or via email at [nancy.c.s@comcast.net](mailto:nancy.c.s@comcast.net).

## African Violets



At our February meeting, Lisa Steinkopf shared her love of African violets that she says are undeserving of their “Grandma plant” reputation. African violets were found by Europeans in East Africa in the 1890’s and were first brought to America in the 1930’s. People have been hybridizing them ever since with the first variegated leaf violet introduced in 1957, and miniatures and semi-miniatures coming in the 60’s. Now there are thousands of varieties.

There are several components to successful African violet culture. The first is proper lighting. Since African violets grow on the equator, they are day neutral. They grow best in dappled shade in an east or west window. If they are in a south window, they need a sheer curtain to protect them from the strong sun. They should be turned ¼ turn each time they are watered. Artificial light is ideal because you can grow them anywhere; they have more flowers and more compact symmetrical growth with less temperature variation. Ordinary fluorescent lights with one grow light are ideal. Lights should be 10” above the foliage and used with a timer so that they get 10-12 hours of light. Variegated foliage needs brighter light, dark foliage a little less and light foliage least of all. Too much light produces distorted tight growth and bleached leaves. Too little light causes sparse bloom, long petioles and thin weak leaves.

Proper growing media is important for African violets because they do not like compacted soil. She recommends immediately re-potting when you buy them in a mixture of equal parts peat moss, vermiculite and perlite. They should be re-potted every 4-6 months. They should be potted in a 4” azalea pot (shallower than a standard pot). If your plant has a long neck, scrape away the scabby stuff on the neck, remove all faded leaves and bury the plant all the way up after cutting off the bottom (to make room to bury the neck). You can also cut the plant completely off, re-pot it the roots and put a plastic bag over the pot. It will grow new leaves from the roots. After scraping the neck of the top you cut off and removing faded leaves, you can pot and cover it with a plastic bag making two plants. If there are suckers or multiple crowns you can pull them all apart and plant one crown per pot.

African violets should be watered with tepid water not on the leaves. Constant watering with a wick or self-watering pot is ideal. They can be placed in a tray with matting made of acrylic also.

Lisa generally uses 20-20-20 water-soluble fertilizer. Blossom booster fertilizer makes the blooms last longer. Professional growers use 12-36-14 beginning a few weeks before a show. Plants raised under lights should be fertilized all year round with ¼ strength fertilizer. Violets under natural light should be fertilized only from March to August every fourth time they are watered.

Leaves of the plants should be groomed with brushes to remove dust. Contrary to conventional wisdom, you can use water, but should not leave any water in the crown.

To avoid pests and diseases, you should buy healthy plants, then remove all blooms and buds and quarantine them for 6 weeks. Violets are susceptible to mealy bugs, fungus gnats and thrips among other pests. Fungus gnats and crown rot are caused by over-watering. Thrips eat pollen and can be seen around the blossoms. If your plant has cyclamen or broad mites or crown rot, throw it away! Neem oil can be used on insects, mites and fungi. Insecticidal soap can also be used. Systemic insecticides are also effective. Sticky traps can catch fungus gnats and white flies.

Propagation of most African violets (not chimeras) can be done with a single leaf with a one-inch stem cut on a slant. This is best done with water under the pot and a plastic bag over the pot. Suckers can be cut apart and planted in similar fashion.

The spring African violet show and sale is scheduled for Saturday, April 12 at Matthaei Botanical Gardens in Ann Arbor.

—Submitted by Jean Gramlich

## New and Underused Shrubs



In April we met at Telly's in Shelby Township in George Papadelis' new facility there. He gave us a tour of the greenhouses with thousands of small annuals growing for the spring season. He and the manager of his shrub department gave the presentation. As usual George talked fast and the pictures went by even faster.

*Aralia* 'Sun King' has electric yellow foliage and can thrive in shade or part shade. It grows 3' tall and wide. Azalea 'Cannon's Double' is a deciduous Azalea for northern climates and needs regular watering. It is acid-loving so poke holes 6-10" apart around the drip line and put a fertilizer for hollies in the holes.

*Buddleias* are deer resistant and should be mulched around Thanksgiving to minimize winter damage. 'Miss Molly' has intense deep rose flowers and starts blooming in June. It grows 4-5' tall and 5-6' wide. 'Lo and Behold' is a mini version of 'Blue Chip' and grows 2-3' tall and 5-6' wide. 'Summer Skies' has variegated foliage and light violet-blue flowers.

*Callicarpa* 'Americana' has chartreuse foliage with purple berries in the fall. *Caryopteris* 'Sterling Silver' has silvery leaves and violet-blue flowers. 'Miss Sunshine' combines gold foliage with blue blooms. *Cephalanthus* (buttonbush) is a native plant that grows in wet areas in sun to part shade.

*Hibiscus* 'Lil Kim' is a Rose of Sharon with extra-large showy white flowers with red centers and is a heavy feeder. 'Sugar Tip' has a gold edged leaf and can grow 12' tall!



Even though it is very hardy, *Hydrangea* 'City Line' series should be protected with leaves over the winter because they bloom on old wood. 'Annabelle' gets floppy in the shade. 'Limelight' is a great hedge and can grow 8' tall and wide. Oakleaf *Hydrangea* 'Snow Queen' blooms in midsummer and its large leaves turn red purple in the fall. It blooms on old and new wood and should be pruned right after blooming.

*Philadelphus* 'Snow White Sensation' (mock orange) grows 6-8' tall with a somewhat arching habit. It is grown for its wonderful fragrance. *Physocarpus Opulifolius* 'Nugget' (ninebark) has beautiful peeling bark and bright yellow foliage. It should be pruned and thinned every 2-3 years.

*Viburnum* 'Cotton candy' is a very hardy large fruiting self-pollinating cultivar. It should not be mulched around the crown.

*Thuja* 'Whipcord' (weeping cedar) is a really unique plant nicknamed “hair plant” because it looks like a head of hair growing out of the ground. It is evergreen with the foliage turning bronze in the winter. It grows in sun to part shade and is tolerant of heavy soils. It is slow-growing to 4-5' tall and wide.

*Weigela* 'Ghost' is another unique shrub with dark pink flowers in spring with foliage that turns buttery yellow as the summer progresses. It grows 4-5' tall in full sun. 'My Monet Sunset' is grown for its compact gold foliage turning red in the fall.

In this article, I have only been able to cover a part of the presentation. I urge all our members to come to our programs to see all the pictures and hear the information our wonderful speakers bring to us.

—Submitted by Jean Gramlich

## Container Planting



Pat Seibel from Four Star Greenhouse, Inc. in Carleton, Michigan spoke about container gardening for our May membership meeting. Four Star Greenhouse is a partner of Proven Winners. He had a PowerPoint presentation with absolutely luscious pictures of gardens made up of hanging baskets and containers with some plants in the ground. He plants cultivars that mostly do not need to be deadheaded. He helps in the process of testing PW plants over a period of three years before they are brought to market.

Landscapes at Four Star are built around color, and Pat bases many of his designs on the color wheel with its cool and warm colors. On the cool color side was a lovely picture of a purple *Pennisetum* draped along the side of a small waterfall. A mauve *Lobularia*, which will bloom to Thanksgiving, was paired with a pink/lavender *Supertunia*. A white and purple *Torenia* lights up a quiet corner, and a blue *Angelonia* makes a two-tone thriller. *Supertunia* Flamingo is not as

vigorous as Bubblegum which tends to eat everything around it. Similarly, White Knight *Lobularia* is less vigorous than Princess which I have planted in a container with other plants which slowly faded away as the *Lobularia* completely engulfed them.

Warm colors attract your eye and jump out at you. Examples are *Gomphrena* which can peek out at you from behind other flowers. *Geraniums* can be paired with bright lemon-colored *Nemesia* for an eye-catching container. Combinations made up of colors that form a triangle on the color wheel can be created using one color as dominant and the other two as accents.

Neutral colors like silver, black and white are best used in the background with bright colors in the foreground. Unusual foliage can add beautiful touches to garden and container designs.

The soil for containers and baskets should contain high quality peat moss. Pat has not had much luck with products designed to retain moisture in the soil. He, of course, has an automatic sprinkling system! He uses liquid fertilizer (18-5-18) for most plants. *Calibrachoa*s and *Petunias* like low pH; while *Geraniums* grow well with a pH of 7.

The pictures were worth a thousand words!

—Submitted by Jean Gramlich

## Notes from Nutcase Nursery could it be Summer 2014

Hopefully by the time you read this, the threat of frost will be over. Hard tellin' at the rate we've been going.

The growing season started out with more difficulty than usual because some plants sprouted in 5 days, (apparently liking the half and half mixture of seed starter and potting mix experiment) and needed repotting long before the outside was ready for them. Forty tomato plants in half gallon pots won't fit on the grow table. And they didn't seem particularly fond of living in a little greenhouse on wheels that had to spend most of its time in the garage because it's just too chilly out. And of course, they were freaked out by one of day of ridiculous heat and then it got cold all over again. My concern is that the tomatoes as well as the eggplant and peppers won't get over the cold start since none of us here are fond of weather below 55 degrees. At this point in time, the second potting death toll has been sad.

Gardening weather is always "seasonal" but it makes me wonder what, exactly, the meaning of the term "seasonal," is. In gardening lingo we usually run across the phrase "dress for the weather," which basically means this is Michigan, we have seasons that can come and go in a matter of minutes and the word seasonal comes the Latin word meaning "whatever."

In trying to keep harmony with Mother Nature, I peeled back the landscape rather than removing the winter cover all at once. Actually, I was motivated more by fear than the pursuit of happiness. It took longer for spring cleanup but the plants seemed better off with the delay. Except for a little patch of crocus that should have been freed earlier. They were flat and yellowed when uncovered but in a few days they were standing and flowering. I felt so powerful.

Of course, that didn't last long. The Dingo has the ability to suck the wind right out of my sail at times, and this season confirmed what I suspected happened to the peas last season thanks to her habits.

I sprout my peas usually just overnight in tepid water but with the weather as chaotic as it was, I couldn't plant them immediately. When I carefully crept through the pea patch, placing each seed four inches from the previous in a W-shaped pattern, I turned to my left to see the Dingo very carefully removing every seed I just pressed in. I suspected something nefarious happened last year when I got the worst pea crop ever. I kept replanting but she was much more efficient than I thought.

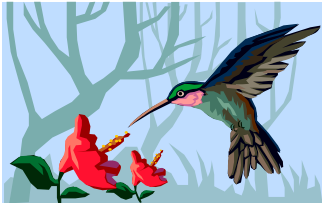
This year I replanted and built a corral out of trellises and bamboo. I also sneaked an insurance crop in the asparagus bed when she wasn't looking, and she got mad and started digging up the wintered-over carrots. I dug up six for myself and put them on top of the air conditioner but they disappeared. If she were human, I am reasonably sure she would be a prison gangleader. But she does have her moments.

I require all furry members of the family to be useful. Fortunately I worked with her early enough in life and she turned out to be a pretty decent retriever when she wants to be. This is rather miraculous because she was supposed to be a Lab mix. I wound up having her DNA tested because I've never raised such a primitive canine. There isn't a corpuscle of Lab in her. And at least half of the other breeds she is are not considered easily trainable. If cookies might be involved, one of her chores is picking up refuse that blows into the yard. A few weeks ago, we were out cleaning and found a piece of bubble wrap stuck in the fence. I told her to pick it up and when she did, it popped. She stopped for second, and then proceeded to pop bubble after bubble. We had to go in and show Dad and she wound up methodically popping every single one. We're afraid of firecrackers and thunder, but bubble wrap, especially the little bubbles, are fine entertainment. Who needs to spend money on dog toys when there's bubble wrap available? I could be buying plants. If only I could readily produce the sound of thunder and/or fireworks...

But I shouldn't be spending money on plants. Every year I tell myself that I am not buying ANYTHING. I lie. If there is a deal to be had, I'm in. If there is something that needs saving, I was a doctor in another life. Once at conference, an instructor for a double session class took time at the beginning to ask people what their favorite thing about gardening was. By the time it was my turn I must have had too much time to think and I told her that I liked shopping the dead table. She gasped. She was horrified that I might be bringing home some disease and I ensured her that I was very careful. It was probably good that she didn't hand out grades.

Some things are a necessity, like food. It was time to replace some asparagus plants so that purchase hardly counted. And then there were a couple of two-fers, or buy-one-get-one, so they

hardly counted. Most of the seeds were half-off. ACO went out of business or whatever, so spending my allowance there was largely worthwhile. Besides, since some things seemed to have succumbed to winter kill, my rule book says replacements don't count. And so far, I have not purchased any of the boxed items available at so many stores. Usually I feel morally obligated to save the poor things but I have refrained. I was prepared to hunt new *Clematis* but, fortunately, they were just a little more dormant than usual. I also feared for the lavender but that seems to have made it in most places. Not so likely for the sage. They look pretty dead so I am trying some from seed. I will admit at this stage of the game, I probably will wind up buying some sage and rosemary plants. It's food, right?



And since food gardening is a favorite topic I am drawn to writing about it, like Herald the hummingbird is drawn to the red feeder. We don't know if it's really the original Herald but we are thrilled to see him back after a two or three year absence. The hummer expert said to put out feeders April 1<sup>st</sup> but I forgot.

When bad things happen to good gardeners, those of us who have been at it for a while often say "There's always next year." That isn't a bad mantra for dealing with failure, but when it comes to a failed food crop the pain seems much more acute than the loss of a failed perennial. As with all types of gardening, the more you grow the more you know but the stakes feel a lot higher when you eat what you grow. Seed packets give you information on planting depth, spacing and days to harvest but say practically nothing about harvesting. At the market you assume that the produce available is essentially ripe otherwise why would they put it out? But in your backyard you're on your own as a novice unless you have a mentor to teach you tricks.

A very long time ago, when I first bought Nutcase I purchased a six-pack of summer squash at the Eastern Market. I had never grown squash before because I never had enough space where I lived. Dad didn't grow it so I didn't either. I don't recall eating it as a kid. I was under the impression they were zucchini plants and I let these shrubs produce yellow torpedoes with no idea of what to do with them. A lady down the street stopped by one afternoon when I was working in a front bed and asked to see the backyard. When she saw my squash she simply said, "I usually pick mine much smaller," and held up two index fingers to show me a space of 6 to 7 inches. I wound up picking several and cooking up batch after batch of squash chips for my posse of ten-year-old girls to take home to their parents. Who knew?

That's what Master Gardeners are for. We can help new gardeners and ourselves by working with crops we don't know so much about. It just takes practice. I realize that every master gardener is not into growing vegetables but more and more our constituency is. That's why Oakland County Master Gardeners should be contacting Nancy Schmid and volunteering to sell the cookbook, [From Trowel to Table](#), to those interested in not only cooking something but also growing, harvesting, and keeping it. Many of those you meet at the markets will be interested in the kind of information provided in this unique gastronomic compendium. (See the previous issue of Roots and Shoots for more information.)

Sometimes gardening is like a sentence of tough love for a control freak. At no time is the gardener actually ever completely in control of anything except perhaps himself or herself. And

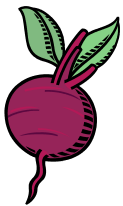
it's really difficult at times to even be in control of yourself when every activity seems to hinge on timing. You have to weed before you plant; it's a rule. You have to water when it's dry. It's a rule. It's a process. It's order. It keeps one humble and running.



Several years back, Himself picked beans using the forbidden one-handed method. For his penance I took him to Bittersweet Farm's plant-a-row garden on bean picking day. The type of bean we grow here, Bush Blue Lake, puts out a long harvest so the object of the game is to not damage the plants and they will continue to produce, as long as they get a dose of food and 10-14 days of vacation. This is why the two-handed bean picking method is used. Unless you're growing dried beans, the pods should be crisp and tender, the seeds tiny. And you gently, so gently, de-bean the plant to limit injury. I have threatened the other picker with having to do things one-handed permanently. To please your beans,

keep fennel, garlic, leeks, onions and shallots away from them. Potatoes and marigolds repel Mexican bean beetles so we plant our potatoes neighboring the beans. Beans are a warm weather crop and I have found that when the purslane sprouts the soil is warm enough to plant beans and corn. Although corn will germinate in 50 degree soil, I usually listen to the purslane.

Normally the first question from a beginning vegetable gardener is "What crops should I start



with?" Of course the Master Gardener would first point out to a newbie the importance of a soil test and then suggest lettuce, mesclun, carrots, radishes and beets for cool season crops. Cool season crops are generally those that will germinate at a soil temperature of 40 degrees. Start early because cool season crops prefer cool soil, low sun or both, which means heat and even the angle of the sun will cause the plants to bolt and set seed.

Beets are easy unless you have rabbits. They may disappear multiple times but if you catch on to what's happening during bunny buffet, with protection you could be harvesting beets anywhere from 1 ½ to 3 inches in diameter, although 2" beets are the best. Beets and bush beans are pleased when planted with each other.

If you're trying broccoli for the first time, you want to pick when the heads are tight. The main head as well as all the side shoots should be cut on the diagonal to reduce the possibility of rot. The main head should be cut 5 to 6 inches down. The plants can continue to produce until frozen. We've had fresh broccoli for Christmas dinner and beyond. Cauliflower, a cole relative, also produces a head which should be picked when the curds are solid and the head is 6 to 8 inches in diameter, depending on the variety. With cauliflower there are self-blanching types, but if you want to be sure you raise the whitest produce, tying up the leaves with pantyhose works.

Cabbages are another cole crop with one head. Some varieties have tendencies to split, especially when watering has been uneven. Some just split because they are outgrowing themselves. One way to prevent splitting is to give the head a quarter turn, which signals the plant to lay low for a bit.

A lot of people turn their noses up at Brussels sprouts but we believe they've never tasted the right one. If all you've ever been exposed to is a cafeteria Brussels sprout, I can understand this completely. But fresh is another story. They need to be frosted for the best flavor, as do carrots and kale, and there are two ways to pick: 1) pick the little heads from the bottom to the top as they grow, or 2) harvest all at once by removing the top 4 inches of the plant a month before harvest, which could be any time from September on. This year I started plants inside and outside of these four favorites. Thus far the ones that were direct-seeded germinated better. Experiments like these are what makes this place Nutcase.



If you've never grown corn and have just 25 square feet of room you can have a little stand of sweet summer heaven with the absolute least amount of lagtime between the picking and the eating. But corn is no good unless you know how to pick it. In the past we relied upon watching for the silks to brown and checking an ear or two for milky juice. Now, we just wait for the morning we see the back lawn strewn with corn husks. The Dingo knows when it's ripe. But even dingoes rely on experience in the garden. The first few years she was here, she kept testing the corn crop for readiness her way and we certainly have had different training, she and I. She began checking readiness when the stalks were only 3 feet high. Many fatalities that year. When ears started to form, those too were harvested. They did not meet the requirements either. When the silks started growing, more were tested. Finally, the day arrived when it was ripe and we were presented with a lovely view of the backyard lawn with stripped cobs and lots of husks blowing around in the breeze.

And I thought it was bad when I had to cover it to keep the crows from stealing the seeds.

One last thing about vegetable gardening: Okay, it's probably not going to be the last thing but after you go through all of the trouble of prepping and planting, remember that gardeners who report the most success with discouraging insect pests grow tons of flowers like sweet alyssum and calendula and herbs like basil, garlic chives and oregano to bring in the beneficials. And even though birds might damage fruits, especially when water is not readily available, bringing them in with sunflowers can double their numbers and the consumption of weed seeds and insects like cabbageworms, flea beetles and grasshoppers is quite remarkable. We keep a lot of feeders going but cut back at the height of summer to keep the birds on the job. Also, if you have problems with tomato hornworms, grow dill around your tomatoes instead of basil. The scent throws them off.

Wear your gloves and keep your tetanus shot up to date. We may call it soil but it can be really dirt-y. And don't chop down your wisteria yet. It has been severely wounded but probably still alive.

## Some Information You Should Know

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#### Mission Statement

It is the Master Gardener Society of Oakland County's Mission to assist, enable, and encourage its members to use their horticultural knowledge and experience to help the people of their communities, enrich their lives through gardening and good gardening practices.

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