



Plant Sale Committee

by MGV Diane Thieme, Plant Sale Team

This time last year, the Plant Sale Committee was about to have our sale planning meeting for our 25th anniversary plant sale. COVID brought it and everything to a screeching halt. If you were at the last member zoom meeting, you heard that public plant sales are again forbidden. Our sale typically brings in a crowd of close to 1000 people. Current crowd size restrictions will not allow for that.

The SEWMG plant sale committee did get permission to run a member-only online sale to sell the plants we have heeled in at Firefly Ridge and two other garden sites. We have thousands of plants that will be available at our usual fantastic prices. Along with the perennials and natives, we have hundreds of beautiful special trees, shrubs, and nursery plants that we got from Song Sparrow before they went out of business. We also have a large variety of dahlia tubers (reds, pinks, yellows, etc), canna rhizomes, and daffodil bulbs.

The shopping list of plants will be e-mailed to everyone once we see what has survived the winter and deer. You will be given about a week to figure out your order. An order form will be sent with specific instructions. The orders will be taken first come, first served (a phone in option will also be available) during a given time period. Only members may place orders and pick up plants. However, you may buy for family, friends, neighbors, etc. with no limits on numbers of plants purchased. Our goal is to clean out our entire stock. Pick up days will be May 21 and May 22.

We also plan to sell the volunteer t-shirts that workers typically receive for the sale workdays.

These are not the same as the navy blue anniversary fundraiser shirt. It is a short sleeve, forest green, MG logo shirt which identifies you as an MG. We also have some gray shirts. Watch for all the details in about a month.

If you want dahlias or cannas early to start them indoors, let me know. We can forward pictures or descriptions of the dahlias. Cannas are green leafed, red flowers.

Member-Only On-line Sale

Perennials, natives, special trees, shrubs, nursery plants, dahlia tubers canna rhizomes, daffodil bulbs, and volunteer t-shirts.

Order forms will be e-mailed to MGVs. Orders taken on a first come, first served basis (a phone in option will also be available) during a given time.

Pick up May 21 and 22.

T-shirts Available

This past fall, the plant sale committee sold a navy blue 25th anniversary commemorative t-shirt as a SEWMG fundraiser. Thank you to all who purchased the one-time only shirt. We raised over \$1000 with that sale.

Again COVID has derailed our public plant sale for 2021. As many of you know, t-shirts are ordered every year for volunteers to wear during the sale. The announcement of the shirt color each year was always excitedly anticipated by the volunteers. Shirts were ordered for the 2020 sale before COVID caused the sale to be cancelled. We kept those shirts in hopes of using them for the 2021 sale. Sadly, our public sale has, once again, been cancelled.

Therefore, the plant sale committee has decided to sell those volunteer shirts as another fundraiser. You have a choice of two colors. Gray shirts with black lettering/design were always given to first time sale workers. Experienced volunteers were to get a forest green shirt with silver lettering and design. Both shirts identify you as a UW Extension Master Gardener Volunteer on the back side. All shirts are short sleeved and unisex sized from small through triple extra-large. Shirts already have been offered through the online member plant sale, so size availability may vary. All shirts are \$10. If you are interested in buying shirts, contact me at diane3033@gmail.com to make arrangements.

MGVing through COVID

by individual contributors

by Karla Geiger, Milwaukee County

2020 was the craziest, integrity-checking year of our lives. I was fortunate to be selected as the SEWMG President for that year. What are the chances? While the year turned out quite different from my aspirations back in December 2019, despite many cancellations and limitations it proved to be a great opportunity.

I was able to participate in countless online continuing education opportunities that made me feel informed, educated and in control of something! I connected virtually with co-workers and we shared our passion for houseplants through educational materials, and even plant cuttings at curbside drop offs. I researched and provided feedback for crop rotation for the Native Wellness Garden. This was rewarding and educational for me. I was able to work occasionally in the Greendale High School (GHS) garden and this brought great joy, despite not having the sound of children during my volunteering.

This year, I hope to work more directly in the GHS garden. Also, I am collaborating with another MGV to mentor a Head Start school sensory garden development, and I plan to be able to volunteer more in person at the Native Wellness Garden and Franciscan Villa Gardens.

This reflection has been a great exercise in counting my blessings! In retrospect, it was a great learning and growing year.

by Glenda Stanlick, Waukesha County

Last spring, my family became involved in taking care of our neighborhood environment. It was a way to get my children out of the house and away from screens after hours of learning in the home. My sons, Noah, 14, and Caleb, 10, helped me remove a trunk load of garlic mustard we pulled at their school grounds, St Dominic Catholic Parish in Brookfield.

Additionally, we put in many hours on the grounds by pruning a very neglected ornamental tree, digging out some buckthorn and collecting dead limbs and pieces. We are not finished, but we took a few months off over the winter. We will resume over Easter break, as we are not travelling yet. I want my kids to get fresh air and to understand the harm of invasive plants in the balance of our ecosystem. The children can spot garlic mustard and glossy buckthorn easily and we are trying to eradicate it as much as possible. My daughter, Josephine, 17, took Advanced Placement Environmental Science at Brookfield East, so I am thrilled to share what I know as a Master Gardener to put her knowledge to practical use in our yard and community. I have missed all my Master Gardener friends.

by Janet Wintersberger, Waukesha County

Tempted by 2020s warmer March weather and my elevated raised bed, my 5- and 9-year-old neighbors planted seeds. The youngest planted peas and the oldest planted green beans. They visited nearly every day and were delighted when

the early shoots emerged. They kept the plants watered and tended them until the harvest. The harvest consisted of picking and eating the veggies before even getting them inside. I recalled doing the exact same thing when I was young. Soon their parents visited and sampled.

Both girls have spring birthdays. My gifts to them always include a book and something to do. In March, I gave the now six-year-old a book on how plants grow, along with packets of pea and bean seeds. I attached notes to the packets - "plant pea seeds in April" and "plant bean seeds in May". She's waiting.

The about-to-be ten-year-old's birthday is in April. She will enjoy reading her book and planting snapdragons and lime green zinnia seeds.

by Ann Phillips, Milwaukee County

Ronald McDonald House Chair Ann Phillips created self-guided Garden Walks with seasonal themes for the Ronald McDonald House (RMH) families and staff -- Tree Identification, Sensory Awareness, Plants with Animal Names. Children could go to the front desk and say they played the game and choose a surprise from a big basket of outdoor toys. A big vase of "What's Blooming in the Secret Garden" with plant identification notes was kept in the lobby. The Secret Garden meant more to the families and staff than ever as a place to connect with Nature.

by Connie Holzmler, Waukesha County

Last spring, Covid-masked and with gardening gloves on, I approached my lovely 80-year-old neighbor to ask if she would like to grow some vegetables in the raised beds her family had built when they lived with her. Carol quickly said, "Yes, I would love that!" So seeds, seedlings, row cover, trellises, and compost were hauled across the street and months of interaction began. Frequent visits to advise, help maintain, and share produce continued well into fall as she took notes, learning as much as she could about planting, thinning, pruning, fertilizing and harvesting. Those two raised beds gave me a reason to "pop in to check on things" and as Carol stated, "a reason to get outside", but always included long conversations on many topics beyond gardening. That little garden became a huge source of pride to her and produced not only fresh, healthy food but, more importantly, a lasting friendship. We are both looking forward to spring planting!

Good things grew from the pandemic

- Earning countless continuing education hours through Zoom.
- Aiding the environment and our ecosystem.
- Helping youngsters to grow veggies.
- Bringing fun in the garden in a no-contact world.
- Bridging generations.

Harvest for the Hungry at Firefly Ridge (Wauwatosa)

by MGV Janet Wintersberger

You may have heard of the Firefly Ridge Harvest for the Hungry community vegetable garden. Located in Wauwatosa, it has produced about 1,000 pounds of produce each year for local food pantries since its expansion in 2007. That year, the garden grew to 3,000 square feet when an adjacent plot became available.

MGV Tom Le Moine has chaired the Harvest for the Hungry Garden for 24 seasons. Tom joined SouthEast Wisconsin Master Gardeners in 1994. He worked full-time and did his volunteer work at State Fair and at plant digs. When his employer offered shift work (four 12-hour days, with four days off), Tom became interested in the Firefly Ridge garden in 1997. It was convenient to his home, he was available four days a week, and he likes growing vegetables. He said, "Harvest for the Hungry provides meaning, purpose and is self-satisfying."

During his master gardener training, Tom learned to plant things that grow in Wisconsin. His tomato and green bean choices represent his knowledge. In addition to learning how to rotate crops, he learned that vegetables can grow in any kind of soil.

After the Extension tills the plot in Spring, the rows are staked and seeds, sets and starter plants are added. Simply put, Tom

says "vegetables require planting, picking and constant maintenance, such as pulling weeds and checking for pests and diseases". The fenced garden features 27 rows of crops. In a six-month growing period, Tom volunteers roughly 100 hours as the garden chair.

Located just off Swan Boulevard and Underwood Parkway, there are a variety of 20 x 20-foot (or larger) gardens. Scouts, families, individuals and growers raise crops there. Specialized gardens include hobby farmers and some who grow only flowers and herbs. Growers sell their offerings at farmer's markets or through other outlets.

The Harvest for the Hungry garden stands apart. It provides fresh produce for many people who otherwise would not have access to it. While canned goods and food staples are the basics of most food pantries, their clients greatly appreciate fresh produce. Tom said that the garden "provided fresh produce to pantries before it became popular".

When UW-Madison Extension feels it is safe for MGVs to garden again, please consider volunteering for Harvest for the Hungry. It is satisfying and feeds people. In its 23 years, Harvest for the Hungry has donated 18,171 lbs. of produce.

This will be Tom's last season as chairperson. Any Master Gardeners who want to become Co-Chairs this season and lend a hand would be welcome. This would provide the ins and outs of the project and instill new ideas for the future survival of this project. Please call Tom at (414) 771-8916 if you are interested.

COVID News from the County Extension Offices

by Ann Wied, UW-Madison Extension Waukesha County Horticulture Educator

COVID-19 Safety Rules – Reminder

Covid safety guidelines have been announced for Master Gardener projects for April 1 to June 1. These guidelines may change again depending on the path the pandemic takes. By the time you read this, there may be an update. Contact me for clarification if you are unsure.

For most MGVs, these guidelines should be followed for volunteering:

If an MG project or activity will be outdoors and will be less than a 2-hour shift with 20 or less people, the process is quite simple -- you click on this link to register the MG project or garden: <https://forms.gle/fb8CJHWWHdSjSt6g9>. Each MG approved project should be registered **only once** by only one person (a project/garden chairman). This option is for approved projects/gardens involving MGVs only - not the general public or youth.

If your project or garden does not fall into the above category or you are not sure, contact me. Other paperwork may need to be filed and other rules followed. I am happy to work with you and provide clarification.

Please note:

- NO Farmers Market booth or booth type activity at a public event will be approved at this time. We may reconsider after

June 1.

- NO in-person youth gardening programs are allowed at this time. We may reconsider after June 1.
- If the program is run by Extension FoodWise program (two gardens are presently approved with Master Gardener involvement), you will follow FoodWise COVID-19 guidelines. Work with your FoodWise staff member and also watch the required video (see mention of video below)

MGVs who plan to volunteer in any way in 2021 are required to watch a video:

If an MGV plans to volunteer at any MG approved project or approved garden (YES- all MGVs), they must watch the COVID-19 Guidelines for Volunteers (third video down) at <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/covid19/video/>.

Video is titled: "For Volunteers". This video should be viewed by all volunteers - not just the chairs of gardens or projects. Garden, Committee, and Project Chairs, please remind your volunteers to watch the video.

Detailed Safety Updates for MGVs can be found at our state MG Website:

<https://mastergardener.extension.wisc.edu/2020/03/20/halt-to-master-gardener-program-volunteer-activities-2/>

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- **MGVs who plan to volunteer at any MG approved project, committee or approved garden (YES- all MGVs), must watch the COVID-19 Guidelines for Volunteers at <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/covid19/video/>.**

• This video should be viewed by all volunteers - not just the chairs of gardens or projects. Garden, Committee, and Project Chairs, please remind your volunteers to watch the video.

Teamwork at the Ronald McDonald House Secret Garden

by MGV Ann Phillips, Garden Chair

The Ronald McDonald House (RMH) is a home away from home for families with children needing health care. The Secret Garden is their backyard for a week, a month, or a year. It is a private, safe, tranquil respite, an organic, four season Garden. It is a sacred space for the staff and volunteers and tour visitors, as well as guest families. Rosie Petroll observed, "...as people who care about gardening, Nature heals the gardeners too...."

Vickie Garcia designed the Secret Garden, Lied's installed it in the Fall of 2001. Nancy Pfau met with Sharon Morrissey, gathered a group of gardeners and we began our work in an approved MG Project in Spring 2002. In these 19 years the House has expanded to 70 rooms, 7.5 acres and the Secret Garden has enlarged twice.

In 2021 we begin the growing season with a team of 18 working MGVs, two Gardener Emerita and prospects of changes in the Secret Garden and a House expansion beginning in May.

We ask every MGV to commit to a day a week and to work with us for one year. Every April we have a "Gardeners Start Your Engines" gathering. We renew our vows! We literally read the Mission statement of the RMH and our mission statement as MGVs. Nancy Pfau said, "...we commit to the Garden and each other". Rita Dragnai observed, "We garden with our souls and become instruments to offer the beauties of nature to others in need of comfort". We invite staff members to talk to us and help us set mutual goals.

When we add a new gardener to our team, one of us is their Mentor for a year (or for life!). We have a complicated Garden with raised vegetable beds, a perennial Alphabet Garden, a Fairy Garden, a Mesozoic Garden with prehistoric plants, a water garden, shade, and sunny areas. We are a registered Monarch Way Station and a certified National Wildlife Federation Habitat. All of us have specialties but we all work in the whole Garden. Our goal is to have a team in the Garden every day. In our garden shed, we keep a Garden Journal. Everyone reads what has happened since they were last working and records their work, observations, questions, and suggestions. I read the garden Journal everyday and respond. I also keep a binder of current seasonal, educational information for them.

Because we don't all work together every week, I try to have group workdays with specific tasks. We have a "Vegetable Summit" to plan the vegetable crop. We have an "Autumn Summit" followed by box lunches to assess our year and choose our books for our Growing Together Book Club. Kris Landvatter expressed that the book club..." keeps us connected outside the growing season. We explore Horticulture trends, delve into issues, discuss, learn, and laugh. We get to know each other better." We think deeply about what gardening means and how to continue to create an interactive nurturing place. Kris said, "...our book club has unleashed a cohesive element to our group and enhanced

the working relationship with our team beyond words?". Chris Cera agreed that "we truly enjoy each other's company."

All gardens are valuable. All MGV projects have goals and purpose. Kathy Lichter wrote, "Ours has a human factor. We are all working to create a space that provides comfort and peace..."

Gail Morgan sees the Garden as a place of solace and a refuge, a chance to live in the moment and be rejuvenated.

"We are a cohesive group because every one of us strongly believes in the mission of the House" Barb Troy wrote, "We all understand the therapeutic value of diggin' in the dirt and being outside." Liz Nickerson added "...and we know how to have fun!"

We have a weekly, year round Family Garden Horticultural Education Program. We are growing Gardeners, cultivating friendships and hope. We lead tours and have noon Garden walks for the staff.

As a leader I try to get to know each person, appreciate their uniqueness, offer them challenges and opportunities to grow personally, learn and contribute significantly to our work. Kris (Landvatter) is an excellent communicator and that is essential for sending e-mails and making sure everyone is connected and informed. We have a great relationship with our partner, the Ronald McDonald House. Ann Petrie, President and CEO, is a champion of the Secret Garden and of the landscape. Ann noted that during the pandemic the House stayed open safely and serve 984 families, 12,301 nights." The Secret Garden meant more than ever as it was a serene place to escape the fear and uncertainty". Heather Egerer, Director of Volunteer Services, is always helpful. Barb Sands reflected that the respect shown us and that we have for the staff and we all have for our families is essential to the service we give.

We all consider it a privilege to work together as University of Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Volunteers and to serve the Ronald McDonald House Mission.



Plant Family Profile: Verbenaceae

by MGV Victoria Robison

This running series profiles specific plant families and their species' evolution, biology, ecology, and ethnobotanical uses. In this profile, I cover the verbena or vervain family.

This family of mostly tropical flowering plants comprises 1,200 species characterized by hairy, serrated leaves with spikey—sometimes woolly—inflorescences composed of small fragrant flowers. Though most are native to the Americas, the true vervains are native to Eurasia.

Fragrant flowers that pollinators love

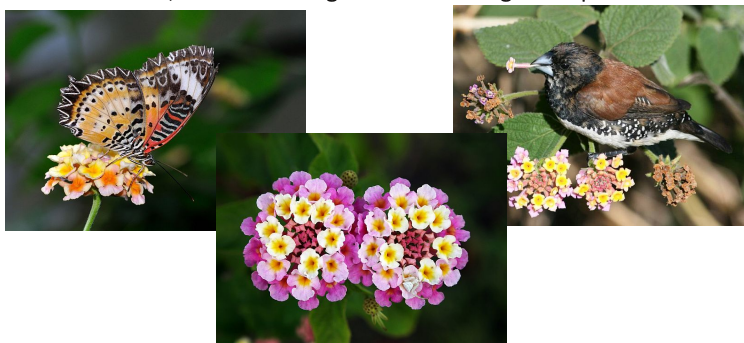
The fragrant, attractive flowers of this family's species make them great candidates for pollinator gardens. A number also are well-suited for drought-resistant, prairie, or trailing environments.

The beebrushes (*Aloysia*), of which lemon verbena is a member, are typically aromatic shrubs and trees. Lemon verbena is renowned for its delicate, lemony scent and flavor, which I will revisit later. Sweet almond verbena or incense bush is a drought-resistant shrubby bush with an intense almond fragrance that attracts butterflies and hummingbirds.



Sweet almond verbena (*Aloysia virgate*)

The lantanas also are popular with pollinators. The tubular flowers of common lantana come in many colors along with a peppery, "tutti frutti" smell and nectar that elicits many butterfly species. The flowers change color at different stages in their life, which is thought to act as a signal to pollinators.



Lantana camara (with Leopold Lacewing on left and red-backed mannikin bird on right)

Unlike the rest of the plants in this family, the true vervains (*Verbena* sp.) include some species native to Europe and Asia, represented by common vervain. Like others in the family, the vervains are known for fuzzy leaves and stems and spiky inflorescences. Their typically small, sometimes tubular flowers consist of usually blue or purple petals. Purpletop is known for its drought tolerance and pollinator attraction, particularly to native bees and beneficial insects.

Aromatic herbs with culinary and medicinal uses

Lemon verbena, also known as lemon beebrush, is a favorite among gardeners and cooks for its delicate, lemony fragrance and flavor that goes well in both savory and sweet dishes, and especially as a flavoring for beverages. Research confirms its antioxidant, antimicrobial, and sedative properties, although therapeutic usage is not confirmed. Its wide medicinal, aromatic, and culinary usage in Latin America dates back to the Inca period. The most popular method of using it is in leaf infusions for a refreshing drink and to flavor beverages like the mildly alcoholic chicha, the Peruvian soda Inca Kola, or yerba mate (a caffeinated drink favored in Latin America). Although lemon verbena is perennial and evergreen in its native climate, it is annual here in Wisconsin. If left inside, it will drop leaves over winter and regrow them in spring.



Lemon verbena from author's porch garden

Blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*)

The lippias are tropical fragrant shrubs found worldwide. The leaves of some species are culinary herbs with uses similar to oregano, to which they are not closely related. One particularly interesting plant is koseret (*Lippia abyssinica*), a flowering shrubby herb that is dried and used in Ethiopian cuisine; it has a camphorous and minty fragrance and flavor purportedly similar to basil. It is commonly included in niter kibbeh, a spiced clarified butter or oil, as well as afrin, a spice mix. Its close relative, the Mexican oregano plant (*L. graveolens*), has wide usage across Mexico and Central America; its flavor is similar to that of oregano. Still another fragrant and edible plant is pineapple verbena (*Nashia inaguensis*), an evergreen Caribbean shrub that likes trailing along sunny, rocky outcroppings. Its aromatic leaves are used to make an herbal tea described as tasting like citrus, vanilla, or pineapple.



Dried koseret herb



Mexican oregano

Invasive plants

Although they are favored ornamentals and pollinator attractants in some places, in other places a number of species in this family are considered highly invasive, chiefly species of the *Duranta* genus, lantanas, and porterweeds, and particularly in biodiverse environments like Australia, South Africa, islands of Oceania, and Southeast Asia. Their predilection for disturbed sites, vigorous growth, and attractiveness to birds for their fruit means they can take over locally unique plant varieties.

News from the County Extension Offices

by Ann Wied, UW-Madison Extension Waukesha County Horticulture Educator

Thank you!

In case you missed it, Master Gardener Volunteer Appreciation Week was April 5-9! E-mails were sent by the State Master Gardener Program, and I sent a few too. I realize not everyone reads every e-mail so I wanted to say "thank you" here.

Some of you have been volunteers for more than 20 years and were even there to welcome me when I joined Extension, while others may have joined the program over the years or just recently became a certified MG. Please know that I appreciate all of you and all that you have done through your volunteer hours. You have given your time and service to our community. Thank you! Thank you!

Master Gardener OnBoarding Lite

What's Onboarding Lite? This is the new online training course for MGs that teaches all about the MG program. It is strongly recommended that ALL MGs take this course in 2021 (Yes YOU). If you complete it, it will count for your 10 hour Continuing Education requirement (even if it takes you less than 10 hours to complete it.) It's free to current volunteers. By having all MGs participate in this, everyone will know about the program. (There was concern that some Master Gardener orientations across the state differed drastically from others. This will eliminate misinformation about the WI MG Program.) A link to this course was sent out in April. You can take this on-line course anytime in 2021. After you take it, be sure to record your 10 hours of CE in the ORS. Label it MG OnBoarding Lite. No other details are necessary. The state MG office is also looking into making a printed version that can be read for those who may have internet or on-line technology concerns. Watch your email for an announcement if and when this version is available or contact me.

Virtual Volunteer Opportunity Fair

Each year in February we have held a MG Volunteer Opportunity Fair (VOF). Because of the pandemic, we did not have one this year. We have decided to make a virtual VOF. The link to it should be shared sometime in April. It will also be posted on a website and will be available for you to view year-round. It will include all volunteer projects, gardens, committees, etc and contact information for MG Chairs. We hope you will find it helpful. A big thank you to MGs Jennifer Lazewski and Susan McDonell for pulling it together. Can't find it? Contact me and I will direct you to where the VOF can be found.

Volunteer Hours/Continuing Education for 2021

Because of the uncertainty of the pandemic, there is no minimum number of volunteer hours required. If you do volunteer though, we want you to record your hours in the Online Reporting System. There is no pressure for you to volunteer. Volunteer only if you feel comfortable. Ten hours of Continuing Education (CE) is still required for 2021. Unsure what counts for CE? Go to the link to read policy: <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/sewmg/documents/> If you do not have access to a computer, contact me and I will send you a copy of the CE Policy that was updated in June of 2020.

Welcome to all New MGs!

I want to extend a BIG warm welcome to all our new MGs who joined the MG Milw/Wauk County group. These folks completed the new Foundations in Horticulture (FIH) course in fall 2020/winter 2021. They then registered and completed the MG OnBoarding Course and are MGs for 2021! If you are one of the new MGs and have any questions, please reach out to me!

The President's Letter

by MG Jim Fratrack

Hello folks. Here is a stanza from a poem called *An April Day* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

When the warm sun, that brings
Seed-time and harvest, has returned again,
'T is sweet to visit the still wood, where springs
The first flower of the plain.

Spring to me always has meant a new start, a time of anticipation and optimism. As a young boy I looked forward to uncovering the roses, planting the onion sets and other tasks to be done in my Grandfather's garden, although I wasn't too keen on cleaning the chicken coop. In spring, we gardeners are hopeful to see some old friends popping up in our gardens, as well as those daffodils or tulips we planted in the snowstorm last December.

I think we can all agree the past year has been rough on us and was very abnormal. Some MGs endured the loss of a loved one or a major illness. I am truly sorry for those of you who experienced that. Normal tasks like getting groceries entailed pre-ordering, pre-paying and curbside pickup. Going out for dinner was unthinkable. If we did go out we needed to

remember to take our masks and social distance, or simply go to the drive through. Winter weather was not looking too bad until the Polar Vortex came crashing down on us in February, giving us many days of sub-zero temperatures and more snow than we have had since the early 2000s.

This past year Master Gardeners were shut out of usual activities: Home Show, Plant Sale, trips, State Fair, the annual picnic and the ability to work in approved gardens. 2020 was pretty awful, but we have turned a corner and we appear to be headed back to some normalcy.

We recently have seen UW Extension's updated protocols for gathering inside and outside. I am happy to say we likely will be able to return to approved gardens and projects by complying with the strict protocols established by the Extension. So yes, I am optimistic about this coming year and hope you are as well. Who knows? Maybe we will have a picnic this year on August 12 (the designated date). Keep your fingers crossed.

Happy Gardening!

Year of the Sunflower

by MGV Kelly Kramer

Each year The National Gardening Bureau unveils its “Year of the” plants. For annuals, 2021 is the year of the sunflower. I was happy to hear that, since I plan on growing sunflowers in my garden this year.

When people think of sunflowers, they often envision very tall plants. Some sunflower plants can easily reach over 12 feet tall! However, there are shorter varieties on the market perfect for small gardens and containers.

I will be growing two shorter variety sunflowers this year, ‘Zohar’ and ‘Valentine’. ‘Zohar’ gets 4-5 feet tall with golden yellow blooms of 4-6 inches. This variety is said to be pollenless, but will produce nectar for pollinators. They are reported to be excellent cut flowers with a long vase life. I’ve grown ‘Valentine’ before (pictured below), which grows to 5 feet tall and has pale yellow blooms.

Sunflowers are easy to grow provided you give them the right location and care. The location must be full sun – at least six to eight hours a day. Make sure the soil is well dug and loose to a depth of two feet (especially if you are growing the very tall varieties). Sunflowers are heavy feeders, so it’s a good idea to



add compost or other organic slow-release fertilizer to the planting area. Regular watering and fertilizing throughout the growing season is recommended.

There are a few things to consider when growing sunflowers. Sunflowers have what is called an allelopathic chemical, which can inhibit or weaken growth of nearby plants. Beans and potatoes are especially susceptible. Sunflowers can attract aphids, whiteflies and spider mites that are pests that can do damage in a vegetable garden, so plan accordingly. Birds love sunflower seeds, but squirrels and other small critters do too.

It is best to sow the seeds directly into the ground after all danger of frost is past. Plant the seeds in groups of three to four. I recommend putting netting over the newly sown seeds to keep the birds and critters away until the seeds have germinated and the plants are a few inches tall. When the plants are about six inches tall, thin to one or two plants.

As the back of the flower head turns to brown, the seeds are ripening and you should see birds getting at the seeds. If you want to ensure the birds get most of the seeds, harvest the flower head by cutting it from the stalk and placing it in a bird feeder.



From the Board...

by MGV Mary Wolverton, Chair of the Board

The Board of Directors next meets on April 29. Since the January board meeting the committees have been hard at work. We will be getting reports from Finance, Audit, Membership, Bylaws and Strategic Planning as well as the usual officer and Extension updates. We will get that information out to you in the next newsletter. Board minutes are not posted on the website but are available by request. Contact your secretary, Betsy Vokac.

Given the success with Covid vaccinations we anticipate we will be able to go forward with both volunteering and social activities this summer. I am certainly looking forward to seeing the State Fair volunteers in the garden soon.

If any member has any topic they would like to bring to the Board just get in touch with any Board member. They are:

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Our Mission Statement

To support and assist UW-Extension in community horticulture programs through volunteerism, education and environmental stewardship.