

Michigan State University Extension  
Genesee County Master Gardener Newsletter



# DOWN TO EARTH

Volume V, Issue III

3/1/05

## Inside this issue:

Dates to Remember	1
Educational Opportunities	1
Volunteer Opportunities	3
Feature Article	4
Gardener to Gardener	5
Thymely Tips	6
Master Gardener Tidbits	6
Questions & Answer	7
Minutes	8

*MSU Extension—  
Genesee County is an  
education agency funded  
jointly by Genesee  
County through the  
Board of Commissioners,  
by the state through  
Michigan State Univer-  
sity, and federally  
through the United  
States Department of Ag-  
riculture.*

**MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION**  
**GENESEE  
COUNTY**

## Dates to Remember



**March 17, Master Gardener Association meeting,** 6:30 pm. Our speaker will be Ric Adams and the topic will be Daylilies.

**March 4-12, Agriculture and Natural Resources Week,** MSU. See information under Educational Opportunities.

**March 5, Stuck on Gardening Conference,** Kent County MSUE. See information under Educational Opportunities.

**March 10, Master Gardener Volunteer Spring Bulb Fundraiser** order deadline. Turn in at the MSUE office.

**March 10, Plants of Distinction 2005,** by MSUE Genesee. Registration is

still open. For more information, call (810) 244-8512.

**March 19, Spring into Gardening Master Gardener Conferences,** Mt. Pleasant and Ubly, Michigan. See information under Educational Opportunities.

**April 4-May 23, Genesee Junior Master Gardener Training.** For more information, call (810) 244-8530.

**May 4, Spring Seminar, Genesee Master Gardener Association.**

**June 20-22, Master Gardener Summer Conference,** MSU.

**June 25, Genesee Master Gardener Association Garden Tour.**

**July 19, Genesee Master Gardener Association Tea Party Fundraiser** at Avalon Hospice.

**July 24-27, International Master Gardener Conference,** Saskatoon, Canada. Visit [www.MasterGardener2005.usask.ca](http://www.MasterGardener2005.usask.ca)

**August 5, MSU Garden Day,** MSU, East Lansing. For more information, contact (517) 355-5191 x 1139.

**October 1, Fall into Spring** Master Gardener Conference, Genesee Master Gardener Program.

## Educational Opportunities

**Genesee Master Gardener Association,** 2005 meetings are held at the MSUE-Genesee office and start at 6:30 pm. For more information, contact Terry McLean at (810) 244-8530.\*\*\*

- **Daylilies,** March 17, Ric Adams
- **Those Darn Bugs,** April 21, Howard Russell
- **Spring Plant Something New,** May 4, MGA fundraiser, Cost: \$25.
- **Why Not a Pond Without a Liner?,** May 19,

Darren Bagley

**Agriculture and Natural Resources Week** at Michigan State University, March 4-12, 2005. Many workshops, seminars, and conferences,

*(Continued on page 2)*

# Educational Opportunities cont.

(Continued from page 1)

including these workshops sponsored by the Master Gardener Volunteer Program:

- **Introduction to Garden Design**, March 8.
- **Advanced Garden Design I**, March 9
- **A Garden Variety**, March 10

For complete ANR week information go to the website: [www.canr.msu.edu/anrweek](http://www.canr.msu.edu/anrweek) or pick up the free ANR week guidebook available now at the MSU Extension office.\*\*\*

**Stuck on Gardening Conference**, Kent County, Grand Rapids, March 5th. Cost: \$60. For more information, call (616) 336-3265.\*\*\*

**Michigan Master Gardener Association, St. Clair County** Winter Lecture Series, Port Huron Municipal Office Center Auditorium, 100 McMorran Blvd., Port Huron 7 - 9 pm. Tickets are \$12.50 each. For more information call (810) 385-3289.\*\*\*

- **Woody Plants**, March 8, Steven Nikkila.
- **Perennial Ground Covers**, April 12, Pam Palecheck.

**Spring into Gardening Conference**, Isabella County, Mt. Pleasant, March 19th. Cost: \$45. Conference flyer is available online at [www.isabellacounty.org/dept/msue/flyers/sigregister05.pdf](http://www.isabellacounty.org/dept/msue/flyers/sigregister05.pdf). Registration is still open. For more information, contact Tracey Knack at [knackt@msue.msu.edu](mailto:knackt@msue.msu.edu) or (989) 772-0911 x 215.\*\*\*

**Spring into Gardening Conference**, Huron County, Ubley, March 19th. Cost: \$30. For more information, call (989) 269-9949.\*\*\*

**Lapeer MSUE Spring Classes**, 287 W. Nepessing St., Lapeer. For more information, call Kim at (810) 667-0344.\*\*\*

- **Vegetable Gardening Fun Day**, March 19, 10-4. Cost: \$10
- **Advanced Garden Design 2**, April 2 (Intro & Advanced I prerequisite). Cost: \$75. (will also be held at MSU on April 23. Call (517) 355-5101 X 408
- **Garden Design Graphics**, April 30 (no prerequisite needed). Cost: \$75.00

**Emerald Ash Borer Update**, March 21, 6-7:30 pm, Mary Wilson, MSUE office. No charge. For more information, call (810) 244-8530.\*\*\*

**Saturday AM Gardener**, B109 Plant & Soil Sciences Bldg, MSU, East Lansing. All classes will be from 9 am - 11 am unless otherwise noted. For more information, contact Ann Hancock at (517) 355-5191, ext 348 or go to [www.hrt.msu.edu/outreach/sm120.htm](http://www.hrt.msu.edu/outreach/sm120.htm).\*\*\* (craft classes 1/2 credit)

- **Pruning Wisteria**, March 26, 2005, Session 1 9-10:30 am; Session 2 10:45 am-noon. Cost: \$25
- **Let's Start Our Garden**, April 16, 9-11 am. Cost: \$40.
- **Garden Bird Walk**, May 7, 8-10 am. Cost: \$20.
- **Nursery Road Trip**, June 18, 8am-6 pm. Cost: \$50

**ForMar Arboretum Classes**, 2142 N. Genesee Rd., Burton. For more information, contact (810) 789-8568.\*\*\* (craft classes count 1/2 credit)

- **Tree Pruning**, March 5 10:00 am. Brian VanPatten. Cost: \$7.00.
- **Nature's Watercolors**, April 6 7:00 p.m. Artist Pat Heinz. Pre-

registration required. Cost: \$25.00.

- **Emerald Ash Borer**, April 9 10:00 a.m. Pre-registration **NOT** required. Cost: \$7.00.
- **Stepped Trellis Workshop**, April 13 7:00 p.m. Pre-registration required. Cost: \$42.00.
- **Bonsai Workshop**, April 16, 10:00 a.m. Class limited to 20 participants. Mark and Becky Hanner of Stone Garden Nursery. Pre-registration required. Cost: \$27.00.
- **Shade Gardening**, April 20, 7:00 - 9:00 pm. Roxanne Gabriel from WOJO's Garden Splendors Cost: \$7.00.
- **Daylily Presentation**, April 27 7:00 p.m. Ric Adams, Pre-registration **NOT** required. Cost: \$7.00.

**Amazing U Winter Gardening** classes. For more information, call (810) 767-9490 or email [non-credit@list.flint.umich.edu](mailto:non-credit@list.flint.umich.edu)\*\*\*

- **Pruning**, March 7, 6-8 pm, Eastside Senior Center. Cost: \$50 (includes tools).
- **Growing Great Roses for Michigan**, March 23, 5:30-8:30 pm. Davison-Richfield Senior Center. Nancy Lindley. Cost: \$15.
- **Critter Control**, April 4, 6-8 pm, Eastside Senior Center. Jenny Burrows. Cost: \$20

**Flint Public Library**, 1026 E. Kearsley St., Flint. Admission is free. For more information, contact (810) 232-7111.\*\*\*

- **Container Gardening**, Nancy Dillingham, MG, March 12, 10:00 am.

(Continued on page 3)

# Volunteer Opportunities

**Grow Lab update:** Stewart Elementary in Flint needs a shepherd for the lab in the kindergarten class. This lab has already been planted, it needs someone to check on it periodically. Grow Lab chairperson Carol Groat has requested donations of small pots (3", 4" sizes) for repotting projects. Drop them off at the MSU Extension office, or contact Carol or Dave Groat directly at (810) 695-0881 or davidwgroat@aol.com

**Children's Services Fair** at Courtland Center in Burton Wednesday, March 23rd, needs Master Gardener helpers for the 2-6 shift. Volunteers will be doing gardening crafts with kids and sharing information with their caregivers. For more information, contact Terry at (810) 244-8530.

**MGA Tea Party**, July 19, at Avalong Hospice. Help is needed in planning this event. Meet before the monthly MGA meeting on March 17 at 5:45, MSUE office. For more information, contact chairperson Linda Patterson at (810) 686-4384.

*It is utterly forbidden to be half-hearted about gardening. You have got to love your garden whether you like it or not.*

*W.C. Sellar & R.J. Yeatman,  
Garden Rubbish*

## Educational Opportunities cont.

*(Continued from page 2)*

**Association of Professional Gardeners**, 7th Annual Meeting & Conference, March 20, 8 am - 3:30 pm, Wojo's Greenhouse, Ortonville. For more information, call (248) 627-6498, or go to: [www.associationofprofessionalgardeners.org](http://www.associationofprofessionalgardeners.org)\*

**MI Orchid Society** hands-on orchid program, Laurel Park Place Mall, Livonia, March 20, 10 am. For more information, call Rosie Kiley at (586) 776-6222.

**Heavenly Scent Herb Farm** classes, 13730 White Lake Rd., Fenton. For more information, call (810) 629-9208.\*

- **Fantastic Foliages**, April 9, 10:30 - 12:00

- **Great Perennials of Heavenly Scent**, April 16, 10:30-12:00

**Annual Earth Day Celebration** at Mott Community College, April 23. Seminars, children's activities, many garden organizations sharing information. For more information, contact Suzanne Lossing @ [slossing@mcc.edu](mailto:slossing@mcc.edu), or Rebecca Gale-Gonzalez @ [rgale@mcc.edu](mailto:rgale@mcc.edu) or by calling (810) 762-0455.\*\*\*

**Entrepreneurship & Innovation** - Creating an Idea You Can Profit From., MSU Product Agriculture Center Innovation Academy, March, 2005. 6 different dates & locations. For more information, call (517) 432-8751, or go to: [www.aec.msu.edu/product](http://www.aec.msu.edu/product)\*\*\*

\*\*\*Classes count for full educational credit.

\*Classes count for half educational credit.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Certified Master Gardener Volunteers are required to have 5 educational credit hours annually (along with 15 volunteer hours) to recertify and remain active in the program. Any 5-hour combination of these credits is acceptable!

# Feature Article

## Is it Time to Plant Yet?

March is an exciting time in the garden. Everything is fresh and full of expectation. Weeds and pests are at a minimum and colorful blooms on a spring day can raise the spirits and nourish the soul of any gardener. Plants such as the crocus, hyacinth, tulip and daffodil awake from their deep winter sleep and stretch through the soil rising and reaching to give homage to the sun in astonishing colors across nature's palette.

*Take thy plastic spade, It is thy pencil; take thy seeds, thy plants, They are thy colours. -William Mason, The English Garden, 1782*

Did you ever stop to wonder why so many gardeners plant so early in the spring? With signs of spring around every corner, the impulse to dig and plant is very hard to resist. Knowing when to plant has always been a gardener's greatest challenge, and many approaches have proven erroneous. Relying on calendar dates such as St. Patrick's Day for potatoes or April 1st for perennials can cause problems. Frost dates can vary enormously from one year to the next, as we all know. A number of gardeners rely on phenology which deals with the relations between climate and periodic biological phenomena, or, put another way, nature's response to seasonal and climatic changes in its environment. This is similar to the belief that when lilacs begin to leaf out gardeners should plant hardy annuals and cool season vegetables. However that approach is greatly effected by the weather and sea-

sonal changes including variations in the duration of sunlight, precipitation, temperature and other controlling factors.

Many common folklore and weather sayings are based on observations of nature's cycles and rhythms with gardeners still following many of these phenology indicators and observations such as:

*Ash before oak, We're in for a soak.  
Oak before ash, We're in for a splash.*

Also, When the daffodils begin to bloom it is time to plant pea. When the blossoms of the apple tree begin to fall, plant your corn seeds. When dandelions are blooming plant beets and carrots. Plant potatoes when the shadbush flowers. When elm leaves are the size of a penny plant kidney beans.

*It is a golden maxim to cultivate the garden for the nose, and the eyes will take care of themselves. -  
Robert Louis Stevenson*

I count on planting spring bulbs in the fall to ensure color when winter has spent its last days and given way to spring as well as a rich bounty of fragrance. I count on the Viola 'Penny' to be a heavy bloomer with tons and tons of small flowers in cold and the heat. The larger faced Pansy 'Universal Plus' endures any situation Mother Nature sends its way. The Snapdragon 'Chandelier' is a cool weather favorite with a trailing habit perfect for hanging baskets or window boxes and tolerates temperatures down to 40 degrees F. The Argyanthemum

'Comet' daisy is perfect for those unpredictable spring freezes and this tough little guy will bloom well into the summer. The texture of the Helichrysum 'Silver Spike' reminds me of a spiky version of a Lamb's Ear and tolerates light frosts well. The lemon yellow flowers of the tumbling winter jasmine tantalize me during the January thaw. One of these years I need to pay attention to the treacherous and beautiful February daphne nestled next to the winter aconite to see if it actually does bloom in February since in March this fragrant little shrub is gloriously in bloom with tiny pink flowers.

*I know that if odour were visible, as colour is, I'd see the summer garden in rainbow clouds. -Robert Bridges, "Testament of Beauty"*

I just need to keep telling myself to wait just a little longer, just a little while longer to plant in warm soil. And by the way, just so you know, winter is officially over when the witch hazel blooms.

*Source: Reader's Digest Illustrated Guide to Gardening  
Submitted by: Mary Renton  
MG '02*

# Gardener to Gardener

## Cloud Formations can Predict the Weather

Clouds are basically four primary types: cirrus, cumulus, stratus and nimbus. The cirrus clouds are those feathery puffs of clouds high in the atmosphere that look like they have been painted with an artist's brush. A halo around the sun is light filtering through cirrus clouds. Cirrus clouds usually indicate fair weather, and in abundance they mean rain is coming in about twenty four hours. Cumulus clouds are big, white rounded masses of individual clouds with a soft and fluffy appearance, much like marshmallows, and which often appear in fair weather in a blue sky during the day then disappear at night. When these clouds start to build vertically in large banks, it's a pretty good warning sign of possible brief showers in the afternoon or evening. Stratus clouds are generally long horizontal gray banks or gray bands of clouds that form near the earth's surface massing together so as to nearly cover the sky. Their increase means rain is coming soon. Nimbus clouds or nimbostratus clouds are dark gray low masses of clouds that have no definite shape and appear close to the earth's surface from which rain or snow is falling or will fall. These clouds can appear as blue-black clouds that rapidly build on the horizon usually in the direction from which prevailing rainstorms are coming and can mean excessive rain and possible thundershowers. When nimbus clouds are preceded by sultry heat, and sudden gusts of cool air are moving ahead of them, they can mean hail is developing.

*Source: The Book of Clouds by John Day  
Submitted By: Clouds & Storms by National  
Audubon Society  
Mary Renton  
MG '02*

## Chores in and around the Greenhouse

A recommended cleaning solution for glass greenhouses is a mixture of hot water and a disinfectant. Benches, shelving, plastic trays, pots and baskets should also be cleaned thoroughly.

If you are cleaning a polycarbonate greenhouse use a mild dishwashing soap with an antibacterial agent and lukewarm water.

As a preventive measure against disease and pests, any plant brought into the greenhouse should be washed with *Safer Insecticide Soap*.

To prepare for the winter, check to see if the heater, circulating fan and maximum-minimum thermometer are in good working order.

In the colder climates a single glazed greenhouse can be insulated with a clear plastic liner. This greenhouse chore does take some time but certainly will save on heating costs.

*Source: "In Your Greenhouse"  
A Beginner's Guide  
Mary Renton  
MG '02*

## The Spring Greenhouse Environment

Carefully follow seed package instructions. Be sure to label seed flats according to variety, color and sun or shade conditions. Thin out weaker seedlings. A nutrient for seedlings is the water soluble 5-15-5 plus.

Seedlings need as much light as possible; shelving placed close to the greenhouse south or southwest walls is an ideal location. Be careful not to over water seedlings. Checking plants daily is a must.

Prepare and plant your hanging baskets in April. Exterior shade cloth is the most effective method of preventing heat build-up. Automatic vent openers will prevent sudden temperature fluctuations. Keep a journal of your greenhouse activities and record temperatures from all the "zones" within the greenhouse.

*Source: my own garden journal and the "In Your Greenhouse"  
A Beginner's Guide  
Mary Renton  
MG '02*

*"Seedlings need as much light  
as possible."*

# Master Gardener Tidbits

**We had a wonderful Master Gardener Awards and Recognition Banquet** on February 3rd! Attached you will find the names of the newly certified Master Gardeners along with all of this year's honorees. This year we had 49 new Basic Master Gardeners, and 39 newly Advanced Master Gardeners.

A particular point of pride for us at the MSU Extension office was the record number of active volunteers reporting this year, 320, and the record number of volunteer hours submitted, 17,912.5. Out of these wonderful numbers, 36,100 Genesee County residents were served! Outstanding job, Genesee Master Gardeners Volunteers!

**Congratulations** to four very special Master Gardeners who received recognition for exceptional service to our Genesee MSU Extension Master

Gardener Volunteer Program at our Fall Banquet. The Distinguished Service Awards, for outstanding contributions to horticulture education in Genesee County for 5 or more years, went to Linda Blanco (MG '98) and Mary Down (MG '90). The Master Gardener of the Year Awards, for volunteering the most hours in a year (with a minimum of 200 hours), went to Anna Anderson (MG '04) and Dan Anderson (MG '04). We are very proud of you all!

\*\*\*\*\*

**Clean, new or used** white socks are needed for our Children's Services Fair gardening craft activity on March 23rd. Please clean out your sock drawer and drop them off at the MSUE office!

\*\*\*\*\*

**Genesee Conservation District Spring Tree Sale** is now in pro-

gress. Their catalog has a variety of trees & shrubs, summer flowering bulbs and seeds, books and bird-houses. Order deadline is March 25. For more information or a catalog, please call (810) 230-8766 ext 3.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Visit the GALNA display** (Genesee Area Landscape & Nursery Ass.) at the Genesee Valley Mall from March 5-April 3. An auction of the hardscaping and plant material will take place on April 3. For more information, call Mike Yancho at (810) 694-9958 or email [mike@trimpines.com](mailto:mike@trimpines.com)

\*\*\*\*\*

**2005 Beautification Grants** (max. \$500) for block clubs, community or civic groups, non-profit organizations, schools, etc. are available from the Community Foundation of Greater Flint. Master Gardener Projects are eligible! Applications are available at the Genesee MSUE office, and are due to CFGF by 3/23/05. For more information, contact Lynn Larkin at (810) 767-8304.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Thymely Tips

- As soon as frost is out of the ground, grass seed can be sown.
- A top dressing of manure will help the daffodils.
- Avoid the spring rush by having your mower blades sharpened now.
- Check the potting shed to be sure you have enough labels, raffia, string, fertilizer, insecticide, etc., for the upcoming growing season.
- Cut and bring indoors some branches of quince or forsythia for forcing, and fuchsias can be brought up from the basement and placed in a plant window.
- Firm in small shrubbery if an early thaw comes.
- Make sure plants in the cold frame are moist.
- Perennial beds can be top dressed with a commercial fertilizer such as 4-8-6 or 4-8-8.
- Don't be too hasty in removing winter protection from evergreens and boxwood.
- Don't let a warmish sunny day tempt you into removing winter mulch too early.
- Don't forget to finish spraying dormant oil on fruit trees, roses and woody shrubs.
- Don't forget to check out one of

the flower shows this month in Boston, New York, or Philadelphia.

*Source: Gardening Month by Month in Michigan  
By James Fizzell*

# Questions and Answers

*Q. I planted peonies for the first time last fall. While I was excited to find a few flower buds the other day, I was a bit concerned by the fact that they were covered in ants. Is this okay? I don't want to lose my first peony blooms.*

A. When Peony buds appear don't be surprised to find that they are covered by ants. Ants are attracted to the sweet sap produced by the peony bud. There is no cause for alarm, the ants are not harmful. In fact there is an old wives tale that states the ants are necessary for the blooms to open. Let the ants feed on the sap, knowing that once the flowers bloom, they'll

go on to find food somewhere else. If you want to cut a bouquet of peonies to bring in the house, just turn the blooms upside down and shake the flowers gently outdoors to make sure you don't bring any ant hitchhikers into the your house.

*Q. How can I have early sweet peppers?*

A. Buy plants from a local grower, or start seeds under glass in March. Set out when all danger of frost is past or just a little later than you set out tomatoes in your locality.

*Source: 10,000 Garden Questions by Marjorie Dietz*

# Master Gardener Tidbits cont.

*(Continued from page 6)*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Global Releaf of MI 15th Annual Tree Sale.** Pre-payment is necessary, by check, money order or credit card (payable to Global ReLeaf of Michigan). Orders will be taken through April 9th. Order pick up is April 23, at ForMar Nature Preserve in Burton. For more information, call 1-800-642-7353, or online at <http://www.globalreleaf.org/>

\*\*\*\*\*

**Our sincere sympathies** to the following Genesee Master Gardener Volunteer families:

- **Sandy Struble**, for the death of her mother
- **Jenny Burrows**, for the death of her mother
- **Sue & John Hoyes**, for the death of John's dad.

Our thoughts and prayers are with you!



Sincerely,

Terry McLean  
Horticulture Educator

Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, or family status. Michigan State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture and counties cooperating, Michigan State University is an affirmative-action equal opportunity institution. Accommodations for persons with disabilities may be requested by calling Terry McLean at 810-244-8530 to ensure sufficient time to make arrangements. Requests received will be met when possible.

MSU Extension—Genesee County  
G-4215 W. Pasadena  
Flint, MI 48504-2376  
(810) 244-8500  
Office Hours: 8:00 am—5:00 pm  
Monday through Friday

Check our website:  
[Http://www.msue.msu.edu/genesee](http://www.msue.msu.edu/genesee)

**State Master Gardener web page:**  
[www.msue.msu.edu/mastergardener](http://www.msue.msu.edu/mastergardener)

This newsletter prepared by: Mary Renton, Terry McLean and Janet Crockett.