

The Grapevine

Bulletin of the Saginaw Valley Master Gardener Association

January 2003 Volume 7, Issue 1

Nursery owner offers landscaping tips

Kurt Batschke doesn't have to worry about 12 months of color, the topic for the Saginaw Valley Master Gardener Association's Wednesday, Jan. 22 meeting.

Even on a bitter winter day, all he has to do is look around the Bay City area garden center that bears his name at 1600 S. Euclid and there's plenty of color everywhere.

"It seems like everyone wants 12 months of color in the garden, but they think it's so complicated," said Batschke, the third generation to run Batschke Greenhouse, the business his grandparents first purchased in the 1940s.

"People always think of flowers. And why not? Flowers are the first things that show up when a baby is born and they provide solace for the family who has lost a loved one.

"That same product is used to show our emotions for every situation in between, from a first romance to a wedding. Flowers are so therapeutic, so appreciated that that helps me draw the passion back out of what I do on a daily basis."

While it is usually pretty easy to get color six months of the year, from May to October, the real challenge comes the other six months of the year.

"I hope to provide the stimuli in the presentation I've developed to look at winterscaping your yard, rather than thinking of it as long dormant. There's also things you can do inside, like forcing bulbs, that can provide some fun, some activity, some color and some fragrance," Batschke explained.

"Color is more than flowers. It may be a red twig dogwood, with the bright twigs now exposed with the leaves gone, colored boulders, or ornamental grasses standing tall. Even rudbeckia or black-eyed Susans, with their vertical impression, are very pretty mantled in snow."

Batschke grew up in his family's business, first playing at the garden center when he was 8 or 9 years old, later becoming a paid worker at age 12.

He originally planned a career in nursing but stepped forward to take charge when his older brother and sister

Next meeting	
€	7 p.m.-9 p.m. Wednesday January 22
€	Anderson Enrichment Center, Ezra Rust Drive
€	7:00-7:30 p.m. Meeting
€	7:30-8 p.m. Refreshments
€	8 p.m.—9 p.m. Kurt Batschke, "Twelve Months of Color"
€	One-hour education unit earned

decided to leave the business and move out of state.

"In the beginning we supplied local florists. That changed in the 1950s-60s when we began offering potted blooming plants and did wholesale in Midland, Bay City and Saginaw. Then in the '70s we started a seasonal retail offering and in the 1980s moved back to our roots providing cut, fresh flowers.

"Now, we're a 52-week business
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President outlines 2003-04 goals

Judy Henning is eager to begin her second term as president of the Saginaw Valley Master Gardener Association.

"Last (term), I felt like I was still acclimating myself to fitting in as the president. Peggy Shaver did such a wonderful job; she's so organized," said Henning of her predecessor. "But I didn't feel as if I had completed the goals I had set for myself."

Her goals include the club sponsoring a one-day gardening seminar plus a community session, featuring a popular gardening expert, in 2004. Of course, she added, the board must discuss and approve the projects.

"I think we're ready for this," Henning said. "We're still growing as an asso-

ciation, 167 members to date, compared to 147 at the same time last year. We're very well-rounded as a group. We draw a variety of age groups and members have different specialties. And, our volunteers really care."

Henning sees both goals as a way of expanding the education mission of the master gardener association.

The one-day gardening seminar could feature a keynote speaker to open the session, followed by two morning classes and two afternoon classes, led by local experts. Area vendors would be invited to set up displays, Henning said.

"Every one I've been to also has offered a box lunch," she explained. "I
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Nurseryman is third generation in family business

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with floral, plants, seasonal gifts and home accents.

“When I took over the business from my parents, there were peaks and valleys. I looked to see how we could stabilize the business during those slow periods. Operating 362 days a year brings an energy and a reliability, because people’s needs,

whether it’s a baby’s birth or the death of a loved one, are occurring seven days a week.”



And if Batschke is feeling drained, putting in at least 3,500 hours a year into his work, “I just look around and remind myself about

how not everyone else is surrounded by 8,000 poinsettias in bloom, not everyone gets to work in a 70-degree environment on a cold winter day.”

His 7-year-old daughter, the oldest of three, now enjoys spending time at the garden center.

“I never thought about a fourth generation before. I want them to decide,” Batschke said. “We’ve gone from a staff of five Batschkes to myself and, other than my wife, a staff of 20 other staff and managers.”

Story by Darlene B. Damp, co-editor

Officers for 2003-04

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Henning’s goals

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don’t envision this as huge moneymaker; that’s not our purpose. But any money we did make (from the program), we could use for other educational opportunities or donate to other projects we sponsor.”

The biggest challenge in sponsoring such an event, she continued, is finding a place with enough rooms to hold the sessions while remaining cost-effective.

“I don’t want to empty our treasury to do this – and I certainly don’t want to make neck coolers again! But maybe we could make enough so we could offer it again the following year.”

Ideally, she said, it would meet at a nature center.

“But locally I don’t think there’s one large enough to house either program. For the gardening seminar you would need several different rooms for the classes while the community session would require space for a couple hundred people. If we do want to do something like this, we have to start now because speakers are often booked one, even two years in advance.”

She pointed to last year’s session with television gardening expert Roger Swain at the Midland Center for the Arts

as an example of the kind of speaker the community session could host.

“While I don’t think it would require as much work as the gardening seminar, I would need volunteers to help find a speaker, arrange lodging if necessary, and handle printing and selling tickets,” Henning said. “These are definitely things the board has to discuss and act on before anything can be done.”

In the meantime, SVMG members can look forward to “a great lineup of speakers, thanks to Gail Caird,” (See related story, Page 7.)

And while Henning jokes about neck coolers, last year’s fund-raising project, she has recruited several members to make more.

The neck coolers will be sold at an upcoming gardening program in Mount Pleasant. Only 20 neck coolers remain from the original 400-plus members made and sold last year.

“Although we had to explain what neck coolers were, they raised hundreds of dollars for us and didn’t cost much because all the material was donated,” Henning said.

Story by Darlene B. Damp, co-editor

Saginaw Valley Master Gardener Association mission statement

“Joining together as Master Gardeners, our mission is to promote our enthusiasm and knowledge of gardening by a wide variety of educational and volunteer activities in a spirit of fun and friendship.”

**Next board meeting
Wednesday,
February 5**

Letter from the President

Happy 2003! I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season. Both of our children, their spouses and our grandson were home for the holidays. What a great way to end a year and begin a New Year, who could ask for more?

Another year has come and gone with many changes taking place in 2002.

We lost our Horticultural Agent, Jim Kalishek, a part-time Master Gardener Coordinator was hired, we elected three new Board members, had our first bus field trip, lost our Grapevine co-editors (but gained two new ones), and were involved in many volunteer projects.

2003 promises to be an exciting and busy year for the S.V.M.G.A.

Hands-on classes are being planned, road trips are in the works, great

speakers are lined up for our meetings, and there are sure to be some surprises along the way.

I have just about completed my seed selections from the multitude of catalogs that started arriving weeks ago. There are some exciting new seeds that I am just itching to try.

Speaking of catalogs, we will be having our annual catalog exchange at our January meeting.

Bring the catalogs you do not want,



catalogs you have duplicates of, catalogs that have unusual seeds/plants, or catalogs you want to share with your fellow Master Gardeners. It is always fun to see what each of us has received.

Thank you to all that sent Christmas cards to my family. Thank you for the gift certificate to Fabers, I can't wait to spend it!

A big thank you to the Potluck committee for the tremendous job they did, what a great time we had.

As you noticed, we have a new format to The Grapevine. Look it over and share your thoughts on it with our Editor, Beth and our Co-Editor, Darlene.

Take care, stay warm, and think spring!

Judy

Two seed starters share secrets at February meeting

Two avid seed starters share their secrets and successes with their fellow master gardeners Wednesday, Feb. 26, at the Andersen Enrichment Center, 120 Ezra Rust.



Advanced master gardeners Judy Wegner and Judy Henning can't wait for the first signs of spring to sprout so they eagerly scan seed catalogs after Christmas, looking for new and unusual varieties, along with tried and true favorites.

Wegner, one of the original members of the Saginaw Valley Master Gardener Association, says she was teaching at Saginaw Township's Chippewa Middle School in the late 1960s when she first tried starting plants from seeds.

"The science teacher had a floral cart where she started seeds, and I thought, well, I could do something like that too," explained Wegner, who has been gardening since she was a teen-ager.

"My husband brought home an old door from the dump and he used that to make a stand for my flats. He put up a fluorescent light and I got started. Not only was I planting seeds, but up until a

couple of years ago I was growing thousands of African violets."

She plants 50 to 75 flats of begonias — which she adds must be started in early February for spring plants — and marigolds. Wegner also starts five or six different kinds of tomatoes and peppers from seed for her vegetable garden.

"We have a pretty good sized yard, about 1/2 to 3/4 of an acre, so I use the annuals in the yard. Usually I have way too many," she laughed. "I can't just plant a few seeds — I plant the whole packet! So I give the rest away and plant some at the (Saginaw Children's) Zoo."

Henning says she was tired of spending so much money on plants and decided to try starting perennials from seeds.

"I don't have the facilities Judy Wegner has," said Henning, club president. "She has a huge room. I just have a few racks in my dining room and two bedrooms — and you know how small my house is.

"My husband is a big factor in my doing this. He built me four seed starting tables with shop lights, which hold six trays on each, or 24 different flats. Then once they kick off, I move them into a

February 26 meeting

- € 7 p.m.-9 p.m. Wednesday
February 26, 2003
- € Anderson Enrichment Center,
Ezra Rust Drive
- € 7:00-7:30 p.m. Meeting
- € 7:30-8 p.m. Refreshments
- € 8 p.m.—9 p.m. Judy Henning and
Judy Wegner, "Seed Starting From
Scratch"
- € One hour education unit earned for
attending

collapsible greenhouse that sets on my tiny patio out back and I use it as a hot-house."

She also began keeping a running record of her efforts in 1996 for future reference. Today, she focuses more on annuals rather than perennials.

"I tried ornamental grasses but the seeds aren't always true," Henning said. "I started planting castor bean plants and giving them away and I've been keeping a record to see how large they turn out.

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Mine was 10 foot, 8 inches. They have palm tree-sized leaves. My tall castor bean plant didn't flower but my other two plants did."

Henning annually trades seedlings with Wegner and fellow club member Peggy Shaver. The rest are given away.

"I have to control myself when I look at the seed catalogs," Henning said. "I spend about \$100 on seeds every year."

"When I plant the begonia seeds, they're so tiny, like teeny BBs, and you don't even put them in the dirt. You use tweezers and place them on top the soil, spritz them and cover with a clear plastic dome. After a week tiny specks green come sprouting out and you can see the beginning of a true little plant. I just love it, I don't know why," Wegner said.

Story by Darlene B. Damp, co-editor

Members who want to order seed catalogs before the Feb. 26 meeting may want to sample :

Select Seeds

(860) 684-9310 Connecticut
www.selectseeds.com

Shepherds Garden Seeds

(860) 482-3638 Connecticut
www.shepherdseeds.com

Pinetree Garden Seeds

(207) 926-3400 Maine
www.superseeds.com

Johnny's Select Seeds

(207) 437-4395 Maine
www.johnnyseeds.com

Nichols Garden Nursery

(800) 442-3985 Oregon
www.nicholesgardennursery.com

The Cook's Garden

(800) 457-9703 Vermont
www.cooksgarden.com
www.jungseed.com

Midland's Dow Gardens has series, seminar

MIDLAND — Dow Gardens offers a Tuesday night series, featuring a variety of gardening topics. They include:

Jan. 28 - Landscape Design
Bill Rottiers, a Lansing landscape architect from Lansing help you design your landscape, using basic design principles.

Feb. 4 – Perennial Favorites
Doug Chapman, Dow Gardens horticulturist & director, discusses plants that come up year after year; how to add perennials to your landscape and the proper way to divide and multiply them.

Feb. 11– Pondering Water Gardening?
Advanced Master Gardener Peggy Shaver uses slides to show the development of two ponds. She also discusses site location, design aspects, assorted water features, types of water plants and common pond problems.

Feb. 18 – Getting Beds Ready for Annual Plantings

Dow Gardens Greenhouse Manager Scott Schultheis offers secrets for success with annuals, including site consideration, bed preparation and new plant materials.

Feb. 25– Pruning Trees
Dow Gardens Forester Dan Veresh dis-

cusses proper pruning for shrubs and trees, including forcing clippings into blooms.

Sessions are from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. Cost is \$7 per class or \$30 for all five.

Shade Garden Solutions

A one-day seminar Saturday, March 8, sponsored by Dow Gardens, looks at hostas, ground covers, shrubs and wildflowers for your garden.

The speakers are Doug Chapman, horticulturist & Dow Gardens director; Elaine Chittenden, W.J. Beal Botanical Garden collections manager; Dave Mackenzie, general manager and owner of Horteck Inc, a grower of ground covers, ferns, vines and ornamental grasses in Spring Lake; and Jerry Drahein, owner of Hosta Haven in Grand Haven and retired MSU Extension horticulture agent.

The seminar meets at the Midland Center for the Arts, Eastman and West St. Andrews. Lunch and a tour of Dow Gardens is included.

Cost is \$40 for those who register by Feb. 15 or \$50 for those after.

Call Dow Gardens at (989) 631-2677 to register.

Minutes of the November meeting

Judy Henning, President, called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. Wednesday, November 20, 2002.

Gail Caird made a motion to approve the Secretary's report as printed. Sheila Hempstead seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Judy Henning read the Treasurer's report. We had deposits of \$238, expenditures of \$438.35 and have a balance on hand of \$6,429.

We received thank you letters from MSU for the garden brick and from The Saginaw News for our past two years of contributions to the "Ask the Gardener" column.

Judy told us about group rates we could get for a Spirit hockey game. If a minimum of 20 people attend, the rate is \$8 a seat and we could have a special section.

The new Master Gardener Coordinator is Angela Irwin. She will be working six to eight hours per week. She will be getting an e-mail address soon.

The Christmas Potluck will be held at

Andersen Enrichment Center at 6:30 p.m. December 4, 2002. No guests or spouses are allowed. Donations will be collected for Hidden Harvest. The committee has worked real hard to get lots of door prizes and giveaways.

We need a new refreshment chairman. Becky Guidans is retiring. Thanks for the great job, Becky.

Peggy Shaver told us about the 2003 National Master Gardener Conference to be held in Ohio just one week before our state conference.

We want to thank Jan O'Dell and Patty Davis for the great job they did as editors of The Grapevine newsletter.

We enjoyed refreshments and conversation before our own member, Pat Washburn, gave a presentation "Taking the Mystery Out of Botanical Names." Pat has a lively and interesting approach to a complicated subject.

Submitted by Judy Wegner, Secretary

Book Review *by Wil Hufton*

“Turfgrass Problems, Picture Clues and Management Options” by E. Gussack and S. Rossi, Ph.D. — This pocket guide helps readers identify turf grass problems and implement management strategies to maintain healthy plants. More than 130 full-color photos are included to help identify the problems.

The guide covers abiotic problems, diseases, insects and weeds. Each discussion includes photos, a complete description of the problem’s appearance, the conditions under which it tends to occur and non-chemical management strategies. (c)2001. 210 00. Color. Glossary. Spiral

bound.

Last summer we offered to obtain this book through MSU but did not get that many orders.

The good news! You can order it for \$24.95 plus \$5.50 shipping, handling and insurance. Ask for "Item X-7056".

You can order by mail at: American Nurseryman Publishing Co., Attn: Catalog Sales Department, 223 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 500, Chicago, IL 60606.

Or call them toll-free at (800) 621-5727, 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday; or on-line at: www.amerinnursery.com.

Dues reminder

Annual dues of \$20 for the Saginaw Valley Master Gardener Association must be paid by March 1.

A completed application must accompany the dues. Dues are payable at the meeting or send the dues with an application to Deborah Keller, 1604 N. Thomas Rd., Saginaw, MI 48609.

Meet the new Master Gardener Coordinator

Angela Irwin, a 38-year-old Bridgeport Township resident, has put in “lots of hours” helping develop a database for the Master Gardener program of the MSU Extension Office in downtown Saginaw.

It’s no wonder, says the mother of three, that when the part-time position of master gardener coordinator was created after Jim Kalishek, MSUE Horticulture Agent, left due to budget constraints, she was hired.

“I think that’s why I got hired – I already had a foot in the door, working on the database and helping Jim set up master gardener classes. Of course, I’m still learning the ropes.”

She will spend about eight hours a week, compiling information from an estimated 200 certified local master gardeners.

That includes compiling their volunteer and education hours; setting up future master gardener courses; coordinating speakers; and arranging the annual master gardener banquet.

“I’m trying to get the office organized so I or staff can find information quickly,” explained Irwin.

“The office gets all kinds of calls, from people interested in taking the master gardener class, to master gardeners who have questions about their hours to extending their time for certification.”

Her office hours are from 8 a.m. to noon Monday and 8:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Tuesday.

The next master gardener class will probably begin at the end of February,

Irwin said, meeting in afternoon sessions for 11 weeks. Because the class meets at the MSU Extension offices downtown, class size is limited to 25 to 30 people.

She also hopes to work with the Saginaw County Master Gardeners Association in establishing Saturday morning classes on a range of gardening topics.



“Right now, with the budget, there isn’t time for much else, but if more funding became available, I suppose my hours could be extended.”

In the meantime, she hopes master gardeners will ease the transition by using proper forms and procedures for recertification and providing as much detail as possible.

“Beginning in October 2003, recertification hours are changing. To recertify, (master gardeners) will be required to have a minimum of 15 hours of volunteer service at year’s end.

“They also will be required to have five hours of horticultural education training each year,” she said.

The change comes from Mary McLellan, state Master Gardener Program coordinator in East Lansing.

Irwin also is seeking volunteers to chair and organize the annual Master Gardener Banquet.

“Anyone who helped last year would be

appreciated because I’m starting from scratch,” she said.

Interested volunteers may contact her at (989) 758-2500, ext. 224, or on-line, irwina@msue.msu.edu.

Irwin first planned to attend Michigan State University and pursue a horticulture degree.

But with three young daughters at home and a working husband, it was too difficult to coordinate a full-time classroom schedule.

Instead, she turned to her computer and found an MSU Web site, advertising an upcoming master gardener class.

“It sounded interesting and more what I could handle, what with my family. I like working in dirt. My mother and grandmother gardened; me, not overly so until we bought a house in the ‘90s,” Irwin said.

“I liked the ways I could manipulate the look outdoors with just a little effort. I like results – that’s why I love to mow the lawn, because you can see the finished product right away.”

Story by Darlene B. Damp, co-editor

Newsletter deadline

The Grapevine newsletter submission deadline is February 10, 2003

Send submissions to:
Beth Bedtelyon, Editor
daysendfarm@chartermi.net

Hands-on class March 18

The first in a series of hands-on classes, taught by talented Saginaw Valley Master Garden Association members, features stepping stones.

Instructor Shirley McNier will teach participants how to make mosaic-type stepping stones with a reusable mold.

Each participant will leave the class with a mold and a stepping stone.

Members may attend a 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday, March 18, session or a class from 10 a.m. to noon Wednesday, March 19. Both classes meet in the kitchen area of the MSUE office, One Tuscola, downtown Saginaw.

The cost of the materials is \$15. Each session is limited to 10 participants.

Members may sign up at the meetings; the fee is due when you sign up.

Gail Caird, Program Director

Bus trip ideas sought

Last year's bus trip was fun and educational, and a good time was had by all. Now we are looking forward to summer 2003.

If you have any ideas for a destination, please contact me at 793-1942 or sgcaird@hotmail.com. Also, I would like to know how much interest there is in an overnight trip. To voice an opinion on that, contact me in the same way. Thanks for the input!

Gail Caird, Program Director

MSU Saturday gardening series starts this month

Jan. 25, – Landscape Design Basics, Deb Kinnery

Feb. 22 – Climbing Roses for Michigan Gardens, Nancy Lindley

March 22 – Shrubs for the Garden Border, Eric Stinson

April 12 – Building a Simple Fountain, Ann Hancock

May 3 – Starting from Scratch: Growing Perennials from Seed, Allen Pyle

June 21 – Hosta Road Trip to Wade and Gatton

To register call (517) 355-6469, <http://www.hrt.msu.edu/outreach/SMG120.htm>

Odds and ends

Thanks again

Thank you to Aileen Cowan, Elaine Rappley, Anne Birkam, Jan Meyer, Angela Irwin, Julie Trinklein, Kathy Leach, Dolores Hignite, and Shirley Oryczczak for your hard work, imagination and creativity in planning, organizing and decorating for our Christmas potluck this year.

It was a wonderful evening, and everything went smoothly, thanks to you all!

Gail Caird

Children's Zoo seeks committee members

The Children's Zoo at Celebration Square is looking for individuals interested in becoming part of the horticulture committee.

The horticulture committee meets once a month (February through November) to discuss, plan, plant and assist with maintaining the zoo gardens and butterfly exhibit.

The zoo has many exciting exhibits planned for the future. The master plan for the zoo incorporates four different continents, with the animals and plants being as reflective as possible of the natural habitat in those regions. One goal of the horticulture committee is to assist in that process.

If you are interested or want more information, please call Patti Decker at (989) 792-6633.

Holiday potluck thank-you

I wanted to thank all my committee volunteers — Anne Birkam, Elaine Rappley, Delores Hignite, Jan and Jim Meyer, Shirley Oryczczak, Julie Trinklein, Joe and Kathy Leach and Tom Leinberger — for all their help in prize gathering, flower arranging and great support for the potluck. Without people like these, this stuff would not come off as the terrific evening that it was.

I also want to thank Judy Henning for her help and running around.

I am very grateful I was able to present Gail Caird with the 2003 Potluck chairs Shirley Oryczczak and Joe and Kathy Leach.

I hope each year can be handled this way and a new chair is gleaned from the previous committee.

Thanks go out also to Bill Wegner for bringing the music. What would we do without our sound/audio man?

I hope I have not forgotten anyone because you all deserve a large round of applause. See you all in 2003.

Aileen Cowan

Secret Santa thank-you

I want to thank the Secret Santa who left me the charming stuffed reindeer on the table at the end of the Christmas Potluck

It was a nice thank-you.

Aileen Cowan

Cranbrook sponsors horticulture symposium

TROY, MI — The Cranbrook Gardens Auxiliary presents the annual Horticulture magazine symposium Saturday, Feb. 15.

This year's symposium is devoted to The Art & Practice of Gardening.

The speakers are: Karen Strohbeen and Bill Luchsinger, *The Ephemeral Art of Making Gardens*; Tracy DiSabato-Aust, *Practical Techniques for Making and Maintaining your Mixed-Garden*; Maurice Horn, *Choosing and Growing the Very Best Clematis*; and Bill Cullina, *The Art and Science of Growing Native Trees, Shrubs, and Vines*.

A box lunch is included with the registration fee. The fee is \$99 for Horticulture subscribers, \$95 for members of the Cranbrook gardens, and \$109 for all others.

To register, call (877) 436-7764. All registrations must be received no later than 5 business days before the symposium date.

Upcoming programs for 2003

We have a great line-up of programs for the coming year! They are:

- 01/22/03 "Twelve Months of Color" Kurt Batschke, Batschke's Greenhouse
- 02/26/03 "Seed Starting From Scratch" Judy Henning and Judy Wegner
- 03/26/03 "Wildflowers for Your Garden" Ellyn Myers, director of MSU's Hidden Lake Gardens
- 04/23/03 "Exciting Shade Gardens" George Papadellis, Telly's Greenhouse
- 05/28/03 Garden Tour and Plant Exchange at the home of Aileen Cowan,
- 06/25/03 Garden Tour at the home of Kathy Berger, Hemlock
- 07/23/03 Garden Tour at the home of Darlene Damp, Bridgeport Twp.
- 08/27/03 Garden Tour at the home of Debbi King, Saginaw Twp.
- 09/24/03 "Garden Ornaments & Whimsy" Judy Henning
- 10/22/03 "Doubling Up Perennials" Pam Palechak, Michigan School of Gardening
- 11/19/03 "Winter Preparation: Putting the Garden to Bed" Chuck Martin, Dow Gardens
- 12/03/03 Christmas Potluck

In addition, we will schedule a fall plant exchange at the home of Pat Bourdow. That date will be decided later. We also plan several field trips, including one to Michigan Hydroponics on Wednesday, April 30. Keep watching your newsletter for information as details become available.

Gail Caird, Program Director



The incredible, edible Hosta plant

In a recent issue of Martha Stewart Living magazine, a reader asked about hostas as a food source. Here is the reply:

“Although you probably think of them as purely ornamental, the stems and leaves of the hosta you grow in your shade garden are indeed edible.

“In Japan, where much of the landscape is mountainous and ill-suited to agriculture, inhabitants of mountain villages have long supplemented their diets with *Hosta sieboldiana*, a large blue-gray hosta that thrives there.

“Throughout the country, vegetable shops sell hosta-leaf stems, or petioles, which the Japanese refer to as *urui*. Like asparagus spears, *urui* can be eaten raw or cooked and are best harvested while they are young and tender. Mature hostas taste bitter.

“The petioles of larger hosta varieties, such as *H. montana*, are sometimes dipped in tempura batter and fried in

vegetable oil, boiled and used in sushi, or quickly parboiled (so they retain their bright-green color) and served hot, dressed with vinegar, salt, and sugar.

“The leaves and petioles of smaller hostas, such as *H. sieboldii*, are often added to the traditional Japanese bean-paste breakfast soup.

“If you want to try cooking and eating hostas, be certain that they have not been treated with pesticides or other harmful substances.

“Remember to harvest them when new leaves are just forming and they are still young and tender, and try using them in a mixed salad, or stem them and prepare them as you would asparagus.”

Submitted by Gail Caird