

# Shelby County Master Gardener

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



Volume 28, Issue 2—March 2023



## President's comments

By Jim McCracken

### Let the Gardening Begin

Get excited as the 2023 gardening season is about to begin. Rekindle the passion within yourself to garden. Always remember the who or what that caused you to love gardening in the first place. Set high goals for that piece of soil you garden with to make this year the BEST paradise you have ever created. Garden like there's no tomorrow, your plants deserve it. Most importantly have fun throughout the season as you meet challenges. Embrace any setback as a true learning opportunity to become better at your craft. As always happy gardening.

### Proud My Son Loves Gardening

As a Master Gardener one of my main goals is to influence and encourage others to love gardening. I never really thought about that goal before joining our organization in 2014. As our children were growing up I had a garden and enjoyed raising vegetables. I really don't remember forcing the kids to help with the chores associated with a vegetable garden. Rather it was help if you like, the work will get done with or without you lending a hand. A couple of decades later I now realize perhaps I was sowing a seed for of oldest son Dan to enjoy gardening.

Dan lives in Orlando, Florida so his plant selection is vastly different than what you and I grow in southwest Ohio. He mainly grows fruit trees that he is able to harvest throughout the growing season, which is pretty much year round. He has limited space in his yard so he will prune most trees to keep them small sized. I have listed both a photo and a small description of his fruit selections.

1. **Passion Fruit** – This plant grows as a vine and needs a strong trellis for support. It's fast growing in warm climates, but ironically the vine usually dies after 6-7 years.



The plant is self-pollinating, a heavy feeder that requires plenty of water and sun.

2. **June Plum** – It requires 4-5 years to produce fruit which is oval in shape and four inches in length. A self-pollinating plant that produces a golden-yellow fruit that has a sweet pineapple-mango flavor. A good source of vitamin A, C, and K all which are good antioxidants. Trees don't do well with



wind or frost. The tree may overproduce so thinning of branches is required or the tree stops making fruit altogether.

3. **Star Fruit** – A fast producer of fruit, 1-2 years. Regular watering is required especially during hot, dry spills. Star fruit can produce 2-3 crops per year depending on the variety raised. Trees can grow up to 25 feet and live as long as 40 years. The skin edible with the fruit being firm like a grape. Taste is a mild sweet-sour flavor.



(President's Comments Continued to Page 2)

March Membership Meeting  
Wednesday, March 15, 2023 @ 2:00 p.m.  
Extension Office

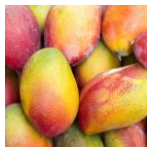
## (President's Comments Continued from Page 1)

4. **Loquat** – A self-pollinating tree that will produce fruit in 3-4 years. It can grow up to 20 feet in full sun. Moderate pruning is required to allow for light and air circulation. Fruit grows in clusters



of 4-7 plum sized, and must ripen on the tree. Crop production is throughout the year as crop ripens in different stages. Loquat is a messy tree that drops an abundance of leaves and fruit.

5. **Mango** – This tree does not tolerate cold temperatures at all. They can produce fruit every year but as the tree matures it will become biennial, producing every other year. Mango trees can grow to 25 feet and 100 years old. Fruit ripens at various times so pick as soon as fruit ripens.



as soon as fruit ripens.

Dan takes great pride in his fruit production. Papaya, pineapples, and bananas are also produced at his home. He has experienced difficulties with hurricane high winds and frost the last couple of years. Dan does a tremendous amount of research when deciding which fruits to raise. Who knows, perhaps he will become a Master Gardener in Florida someday. One fact I know for sure, my son Dan grows plants and I am one proud gardening parent. 🍃

## Volunteer Coordinator's comments

By Doug Benson

Thank you for your prayers and encouragement. Along with a good surgeon and physical therapist, I am well on my way to full recovery from the knee replacement. I had my last PT session last Friday; and just this morning, the surgeon set me free. As those of you who have had the same procedure know, there will still be a period of time before I'm totally recovered. Yesterday, I drove for the first time in six weeks and made it safely to the grocery store and back. The muscles around the knee still get pretty sore if I sit at the

computer for any extended period of time, so I take a break after each paragraph – break time!

By the time you read this, the first of our Garden Series programs will be completed. I'm sure Nancy Russell will have done a great job promoting raised bed gardening. I hope that the program was well attended. The next program will be April 13, with Jim McCracken and Russ Stewart teaming up to recommend good vegetable choices for Zone 6. May 11 I will be focusing on some of those pesky insects that ravage our gardens and landscapes. The final two programs will feature guest presenters. On June 8, Barbara Ray, Dublin, Ohio's nature educator, will talk about wildlife – both good and bad. Finally, Nick Baughman from Kah Nursery will discuss flowering shrubs on August 10.

Mercer County Extension also has evening gardening programs scheduled. Every Tuesday evening in March – 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and 28<sup>th</sup> – Vegetable Gardening 101 will start at 6:00. They ask that you call the Extension office to let them know if you are attending (419-586-2179). I think they will also be hosting their once-a-month gardening classes, but at this time I don't have any details. These are always great programs, and the price is right.

As I have mentioned before, we will be participating in the Victory Garden seed distribution organized by the Ohio Department of Agriculture and OSU Extension. We will have 300 packets of seed to hand out in Shelby and Auglaize Counties. Mercer will have their own 300 packet allotment. I'm not sure what is being planned in Mercer, but here in Shelby and Auglaize, we are looking to do as we have the last two years – that is to focus on the libraries as distribution sites. Our main date will be Saturday, April 15. We will also have two special sites – April 22 at the Peoples' Garden open house 11:00-2:00, and at Lake Loramie State Park's Earth Day celebration from 1:00-4:00, also on Saturday, April 22. We have a number of volunteers willing to help, and I will be finalizing a work schedule very soon. The organizers of the Lake Loramie event would also like us to have spring gardening information available.

Our training program for new MGVs continues. While they do most of their studies online, they also attend several in-person programs, and our active members are encouraged to attend. I understand that the pruning clinic on Saturday, February 25, was well attended and (Coordinator's Comments Continued to Page 3)

## (Coordinator's Comments Continued from Page 2)

went well. The next session will be Saturday, March 25, at the Extension office and focus on IPM and safe use of garden chemicals. We aren't sure of the trainer.

The next, and probably final, in-person program will be the field trip to the Snyder Park Gardens in Springfield on Saturday April 22. We plan to have Amy Stone and Pam Bennett providing some diagnostics training as well as a tour of the demonstration and test gardens – more details to come.

Our March meeting will be Wednesday, March 15, at the Extension office, starting at 2:00. We will try to have Zoom access again. The meeting should be interesting as president Jim will be relaxing in Florida, vice president Dave Slagle will be undergoing some pre-surgery testing, and Matt is still recuperating from back surgery. I'm planning to be present, so we will see what happens. I do expect a representative from Lake Loramie State Park to discuss a possible project for our group. Please try to attend. I look forward to seeing many of you in person. 🍀

## Brighten the walls

By Doug Benson



Have you ever noticed how bleak the hallway from the front desk back to our MGV office is at the Extension office? Matt certainly has, and he would like to see it brightened up. He raised this issue

at the February meeting. He suggested that some of us who might be photographers and/or artists bring in pictures, paintings, wall hangings, etc. to display along the hallway for a month or so just to liven up the place. Not only would it brighten the hall, but it would give you an opportunity to display your creativity. I suppose you might even offer something for sale. Subject matter is not limited, but I would think something related to nature would be highly appropriate.

I will see if Matt has any specific details such as size, framing, etc. and bring that information to the meeting. Please be prepared to share your thoughts. 🍀

## An Exciting visitor

By Carol Strayer

I had a surprise visitor to my suet cake feeder in February. He came back several times that day and continued to visit for about 3-4 days. He even has come back about once a week ever since. I was very excited to have a pileated woodpecker visit and observe up-close. "Pileated" refers to the bird's prominent red crest, from the Latin *pileatus* meaning "capped." I had never seen one in real life. I had been told by a relative, who lives in Miami County, that he sees them in his neighborhood. It's the largest woodpecker that I have ever seen. It's about the size of a crow.

The visitor is a male as identified by the red bar of



color on his jaw going out to the beak. While both male and female have a prominent red crest or "Mohawks" as some refer to them, the female does not have that red jaw stripe; hers is black.



Pileated woodpeckers mainly eat insects, especially carpenter ants and wood-boring beetle larvae. They also eat fruits, nuts, and berries including poison ivy berries. They make a very large and roughly rectangle shaped holes in trees while searching out insects.

They excavate their large nests in cavities of dead trees; and after raising a brood, they will abandon the hole and do not use the next year. Those abandoned holes become good homes for other birds and animals.

I'll be keeping an eye out to see if a female visits in the future. It is truly an impressive bird in both color and size. Perhaps there will be a family in the nearby woods.

An interesting anecdote to this story is that the cartoonist Walter Lantz is believed to have based the appearance of his creation Woody Woodpecker on the pileated woodpecker. 🍀

## Winter Sowing—Part 2

By Carol Braun

Here is part 2 of my winter sowing experiment. First let me say this has been a fun experiment and I don't know if each year will play out the same but for this year it has been fun and made me want to look down the little hole at the top of milk jug to see if I could see green. It seems like I did this a lot!!!

I opened up 2 of them yesterday because I could see green. The lettuce is growing and it looks like I may have to thin the green out in spots if I expect to get any lettuce. The spinach also sprouted and is growing nicely and I may leave it alone for now.

Next, I may add a very weak solution of fertilizer but will have to be careful as the soil is fairly wet and there is moisture gathering around the tops of the containers, do not want it to get too wet, we all know what happens when things get too wet. In the flower containers I have not seen anything green, so I did not open them but will continue to check on them, I am still hoping for my lupines!

Well I will continue to keep my watch on my experiment and if March continues to be as mild as January and February this experiment may turn out well this year. I will keep you posted and will let you know if I get to enjoy some lettuce and spinach from this experiment. 🌱

## Mercer County Garden Programs

Mary Delzeith

We had the first of the Vegetable Gardening 101 series last evening on 3/7/23 (29 attendee). Others will take place every Tuesday evening in March – 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and 28<sup>th</sup> – Vegetable Gardening 101 will start at 6:00 p.m. Ryan is still finalizing speaker for one of the lawn and garden talks and so does not have the schedule ready to release. He hopes to have it ready in 2 weeks. The Lawn and Garden talks will be held the last Wednesday of the month from April through September at 6 p.m. at Mercer County Extension conference room on Sugar Street. Stay tuned for more information coming soon. 🌱



*Lettuce Seedlings*



*Spinach Seedlings*

## DAHLIAS: THE READER'S DIGEST VERSION

By Ann Heeley

I've never been very successful at growing dahlias, probably because they require more care and consistency than I've been willing to put forth. Because of this, I decided to watch the dahlia webinar a few weeks ago, hoping to learn some tricks of the



trade and shortcuts. The webinar was over 2 hours long! I took detailed notes as the presenters (Tara Harper, a relative novice, and Dick Westfall, an experienced and national award winner) took turns explaining the growing process. Both are members of the Greater Columbus Dahlia Society. I found it interesting that the experienced grower broke many of the established rules in dahlia growing as he focused on experimentation, having fun, and "whatever works for you." It reminded me of recipes passed down from grandparents in which there are no measurements, no specific cooking time, and ingredients vary depending on what you might have on hand. With that in mind, I've reduced my copious notes to the nitty-gritty for the uneducated (like me), and I think I'll give dahlias another whirl this year.

**Buying:** Unless you want to be a serious grower, start off with tubers from a local garden center or big-box store. Tubers should not be mushy, moldy, or broken at the crown. Varieties are likely to be common, but far less expensive than those available at specialty outlets.

**Benching & Potting (also called "waking up tubers"):** Start in late March or early April with a slightly moist potting mix, and depending on size, place the tubers in large disposable pans or pots with good drainage. If 4" pots are used, don't let them stay in there too long since root-bound dahlias won't survive. Dick Westfall said to avoid black containers, although he never said why. Perhaps because the tubers would cook in the sunlight when placed outdoors later? Water sparingly when new growth appears. Do not fertilize yet. Label each cultivar.

**Planting Outdoors:** Dahlias are very susceptible to frost, so wait until late May or early June before planting or moving them outdoors in a sunny area. If planting them in the ground, the soil needs to be at least 55-60°. Stake or hoop dahlias as you plant,



and be careful not to crush the tubers. Continue to water sparingly and fertilize weekly. Mulch around plants in mid-June over dry soil. Increase water toward the end of summer to keep the blooms coming. Dick Westfall uses a high nitrogen/lawn fertilizer which would seem to encourage lots of foliage at the expense of blooms. But he said that just because it works for him doesn't mean it will work for everyone, and as long as little to no phosphorus is applied, you're okay. So, choose your own fertilizer??

**Maintenance:** Cutting dahlias after they've been disbudded encourages more blooms since they abide by the "cut and come again" philosophy. Experts say to cut dahlias early in the morning. Of course they do. Dahlias will continue to require good drainage whether in the ground or in containers. Too much water will cause the tubers to rot. Too little will reduce the number of blooms. Other problems are spider mites and disease. Growing dahlias organically is extremely difficult, so if you are averse to chemical controls, perhaps you should consider plants that aren't quite as fussy. Use a spray that contains bifenthrin to kill insects and mites on contact. It can be sprayed one week before a flower show directly on the bloom! Spinosad can be used to control thrips. Use a systemic like Eagle 20 to control powdery mildew and fungus problems. Dick Westfall uses systemics containing imidacloprid to control many different types of mites and insects. (He doesn't seem to have a problem with imidacloprid.) Dahlias may be prone to a host of viruses...in which case the only solution is to remove and destroy the plant so others aren't affected.

**Topping and Disbudding:** When plants are about 6" tall and have 2 or 3 sets of true leaves, pinch out the center shoot. This will make the plant bushier. For larger, but fewer, flowers and longer stems, take off the side buds from a branch and leave the center bud. They are usually found in sets of 3. Pinch out the outer two. When entering dahlias in a show, disbudding is usually mandatory.

**Overwintering Dahlia Tubers:** As the weather gets colder, leaves will turn yellow, black, and brown. Before a hard frost hits, cut back plants leaving a 4-6" stem. Dig around the stem, being careful not to sever the roots, and remove the clump. Shake off the excess dirt and gently rinse. Check for rotten or mushy tubers and discard them.



Let dry in a well-ventilated area that won't get below freezing and is protected from rain and direct sunlight—anywhere from 3 days to a few weeks. Remember to label them. Some gardeners use a black marker and write the cultivar right on the tuber itself. They'll shrivel a little, but this is normal.

You can divide them, making sure that each division has at least one eye. That's the growth point for next year's plant. Or you can wait until next spring to divide them. Shake a little fungicidal powder on them. Store tubers in wood shavings, vermiculite, shredded newspaper, or dry peat moss in paper bags and keep them in an area that stays cool (40-55°), like a garage. Check on them periodically through winter and early spring to make sure they're not rotting.



After the webinar ended, viewers asked questions.

Q - Are pollinators attracted to dahlias?



'Bright Eyes' - a single petal dahlia

A - Dahlias with single petals and lots of fragrance are appealing to pollinators. Doubles have little or no value.

Q - What are some recommended companion plants?

A - Echinacea, branching sunflowers, verbena, blackberry lily, daisy

Q - What are the newest varieties that you would recommend?

A - (from Dick Westfall) I wouldn't recommend any variety until it has been grown successfully for several years. New varieties come out every year, but very few stand the test of time.

After writing this article, I decided to check on the dahlia tubers I saved, but forgot to check on, from last fall. It looks like there is one healthy clump out of 5 with a label that says "Dahlia." Good work, Ann, and better luck next year. 🌱



## The People's Garden—Update for March

By Conelia Dixon

The People's Garden is doing well, and more popular each year through newspaper articles, getting to know people at the Farmer's Market, and word of mouth in talking with pantry shoppers, friends, and many people we meet for the first time. We are well planned for our 10th season with a crop map, a job list, guidelines, a list of things we need, the beginnings of a real budget, a contacts list and are in the middle of building new enclosures for the 55 raised beds.

We have been participating in teaching about gardening through talks/classes with various community groups and now have become busier with that aspect of this mission. Here are the teaching opportunities we have planned so far this season. You are very welcome to attend.

March 18, Saturday, 11:30-12:30 at the Connection Point Church in Sidney, Healthy Me Conference.

April 13, Thursday 6:00-7:30 at the Worch Library in Versailles, - adult class general gardening plus demo, with stump the Master Gardener.

April 15, Saturday, Connection Point Church youth workday at The People's Garden.

April 20, Thursday, at the Legion Hall in Sidney at a sorority meeting, teaching opportunity about The People's Garden and general gardening tips.

April 22, Saturday at The People's Garden, 11:00-2:00, open house with teaching stations for adults and children, Amanda Hurley will participate.

May, last Saturday in the month, participating with a booth at the Farmer's Market and continue each month during the summer and fall months.

June 20, Tuesday, 1:30-2:30 at the Worch Library in Versailles - children's class about gardening with demonstrations.

We are working with Whittier School in Sidney to help set up a garden for the preschoolers by providing two raised beds, seeds, gloves and tools.

Another possibility, not yet set in stone - A Bible study group in Sidney.

Another possibility also not yet planned - a kindergarten in Piqua.

We are limiting the number of beds that community members can rent to 1, due to the need to provide more food for the pantry shoppers. We are keeping the total number of beds rented to 15.

There is no room for the addition of more raised beds at this time. We will work on positive production, producing more in a small space.

There is room for more volunteers! We will try to keep everyone informed of workdays, and teaching opportunities. I appreciate my wonderful Master Gardener friends and all you do for the good of promoting flower and vegetable gardening, making our community a better space to live. 🌱



*Michelle at the Farmer's Market in 2022*

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