

# Shelby County Master Gardener

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



Volume 29, Issue 2—March 2024

Happy St. Patrick's Day




## President's comments--By Dave Slagle

Donna and I just returned from Florida yesterday and tried our best to bring warm weather to our part of Ohio. I could not believe that our yards look like they need mowing already. I did see two people out yesterday with mowers.

I hope most of you are ready or getting close to being ready for all of your garden and landscape work. I know that Doug has kept all of us up to date on information and programs that are going on within our club.

I look forward to seeing and greeting all of you next Wednesday at our monthly meeting. I would like to thank Janet for filling in last month. She did a great job of writing the article for the newsletter and for overseeing the meeting.

Thank you all, see you next week! 

**Next SCVMG Membership Meeting:  
March 20, 2024 at 2 pm & on Zoom**

### Mercer Co. Gardening Program Update

**There will be no evening gardening program in Celina this month. As soon as all speakers are confirmed, the schedule will be announced. Six sessions will be held on the last Wednesday of each month.**

### MG Officers & Leadership for 2024

President	Dave Slagle
Vice President	Janet Nelson
Secretary	Russ Stewart
Treasurer	Linda Jennings
Volunteer Coordinator	Doug Benson
Extension ANR Educator	position open

## Shamrocks are Everywhere on St. Patrick's Day By Carol Strayer

How did the three-leaf clover (shamrock) become a symbol of all things Irish? There has been no shortage of iconic symbols for St. Patrick's Day but one stands above all the rest—the shamrock. The holiday on March 17, which began centuries ago to celebrate the feast of St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, has become a day in which everyone gets to be Irish even if you are not genetically from Irish heritage. Irish legend says that Saint Patrick used the three-leaf clover as a symbol of the Holy Trinity in teaching Christianity to non-believers in Ireland during the fourth century. His presumed death date is associated with the March 17.

The three-leaf clover, a type of trefoil plant, considered the unofficial national flower of Ireland for centuries. People in Ireland used to adorn their hats with the shamrock on the March 17 and this tradition continues today as well as internationally.

When a wave of Irish immigrants came to the U.S. in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were no shamrocks growing in New York or Boston or San Francisco, so they celebrated their heritage with parties and parades; they substituted the color green and images of the shamrock for the plant itself. The first U.S. St. Patrick's Day parade was celebrated in Boston in the 1760's, according to Samantha Bradbeer, historian and archivist for Hallmark. In the 1920's Hallmark capitalized on the Irish holiday celebration by using the shamrock symbol on its greeting cards and had previously made shamrock postcards in the 1910-1915 era.

With the plant well established as a symbol of Ireland, Irish brands caught on and helped spread the idea around the world. The Irish airline, Aer Lingus, for example, adopted the shamrock as its logo. Hallmark continues to use the color green and the shamrock symbol in its products and cards for St. Patrick's Day. The Greeting Card Association cites St. Patrick's Day as its ninth-largest card sending holiday in the U.S. with 7 million expected to be exchanged this year. Over the years, the shamrock as a symbol for St. Patrick's Day has lost its religious meaning but the value of the shamrock itself is not going anywhere.

In retrospect, you don't have to be of Irish decent to celebrate like you are Irish. 

## Coordinator's comments

By Doug Benson



I am being challenged as I write this. My electric power went out about half an hour ago. AES is “aware of the outage and a crew has been dispatched to correct the problem.” Maybe they can tap into the high voltage lines being strung about 90 feet above my house. At least it is warm enough that I don't have to run the furnace. Now, will my computer battery last until the power is restored?

This has been a truly remarkable winter. It seems like we have had about as many days in the 60s as days with snow. Spring-flowering plants are blooming ahead of schedule, my neighbor is mowing his lawn and I should be mowing mine, and forsythias are displaying their yellow flowers. I guess conditions right now aren't that unusual because when we wake up Wednesday morning, the 20<sup>th</sup>, and get ready for our

March meeting, it will officially be spring (the vernal equinox occurs at 11:06 Tuesday evening).

Great news! It hasn't been publicly announced yet, but we are supposed to be getting our new ANR educator very soon – perhaps as soon as March 25. As you know, I was able to participate in the interview process for the two candidates, and both seemed quite capable of doing the job. I believe the one selected was my first choice. I look forward to working with her and hope she will be as supportive of our program as Matt was. *Yea! AES came through after about an hour.*

By the time you read this, we will have had our first gardening seminar. I will go out on a limb, and it won't have to be very far, to say the Jim will have presented a thorough and easily understood program about starting one's own seed indoors to get a head start or grow something unusual. I hope his program will be well attended. The committee has tried various means of publicity – newspaper article, radio announcement, flyers at numerous public locations, emails to previous attendees, and just word of mouth. I hope you were there. We still have five more programs, and they will

be addressed in a different article – as will the Victory Garden seed distribution.

As a follow-up to our decision at the February meeting, I advised Honda that because most of our members are retired and will be sharing the eclipse experience with grandchildren and other family members and friends, we would be unable to participate in their Environmental Day. I received a nice thank you and an invitation to participate in the future. The lady from Lake Loramie State Park emailed an apology for her absence due to a death in her immediate family. She plans to attend this month. The possible tour of horticultural businesses in Mercer County will not happen; however, we are looking into the possibility of having our April meeting in Celina and visiting an aquaponics operation. We should know more about this at the meeting.

I expect to have a coordinators' conference call next Wednesday, so I am sure there will be new information about MGVL apparel, “Good Agricultural Practices” training, and other topics of interest.

We can also look at scheduling hotline time, garden cleanup, Conservation Day Camp, Plant by Numbers, and whatever else you have in mind. Again, I encourage you to keep recording your hours in HOC, and don't forget to check the updates on BYGL and new webinars in the “Lunch and Learn” and “Horticulture Happy Hour” series.

We will attempt to Zoom the meeting, so I will be sending out the February minutes and the connection information for the Zoom on Monday. We would really like to see you in person, if at all possible. In the meantime, enjoy our early taste of spring, but remember that the average frost-free date is sometime around May 14 (Sidney) and May 18 (Celina). This data is from The National Gardening Association <https://garden.org/apps/frost-dates/>. 🍀



## The Sustainable Yard

By Karen Seger



### Composting and Vermicomposting

The secret to a sustainable, earth-friendly lawn or garden is to learn to think like your surrounding native ecosystem. That might sound like a tall order, but it really just requires you to open your eyes and ears.

This process of thinking like an ecosystem means simply learning from nature, trying to replicate it as best you can, and finding ways to implement those processes in our gardens at home.

One of these processes is composting and vermicomposting. Composting is the process of breaking down organic material—such as organic scraps from the kitchen, yard trimmings and leaves—to create a nutritious addition to build soil health.

Making compost requires a mixture of carbon--carbohydrate-rich “browns” (fall leaves, pine needles, twigs and bark) and nitrogen--protein-rich “greens” (produce scraps and grass clippings). Simply stir up to aid in the decomposition process.

Vermicomposting relies on worms to break down organic matter. Worms eat through your food scraps, digest them, and excrete them, leaving behind a highly concentrated organic material for your plants and soil. There are plenty of premade worm bins available. 🍀



## Victory Garden seed distribution

By Doug Benson

Once again, we are participating in the distribution of Victory Garden seed packets. We will have 300 packets for Shelby County. Both Auglaize and Mercer will have their own allotments of 300 packets. Those of you who live in those counties might want to check with your ANR educator to see if they need your assistance.



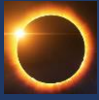
The seeds are to be delivered within the next three weeks. When they arrive, we will set a time for those who are volunteering to come to the office and prepare the packets for distribution (inserting a set of planting instructions). I will have signs for display at the various libraries available at the meeting, and you can deliver them for display.

Saturday, April 13, is the day we will make our main push at the libraries. We hope that each library will be willing to keep a few leftover kits to be handed out to those unable to come on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Here are the times and volunteers:

- Anna** – 9:00-11:00 Carol Braun and Melanie Kuck
- Botkins** – 9:00-11:00 Pam Wagner
- Fort Loramie** – 10:00-12:00 Becky Francis
- Jackson Center** – 9:00-12:00 Deb Cummons-Parker
- Russia** – 9:30-11:30 Missy Francis and Karen Seger
- Sidney** – 11:00-1:00 Teresa Freisthler.

Additionally, we will have packets available during the April 11 garden talk at Amos Library, and Conelia will have packets available at an open house at the Peoples' Garden on April 13. If we have leftovers at the end of April, we will figure something out – perhaps share them with another county who is in need. If you become aware of an event after April 13 that might be a good opportunity to distribute, let me know. Thanks to all who have volunteered to help. 🍀





## THE 4-MINUTE NIGHT

By Ann Heeley

As everyone knows by now, Shelby County is the path of a total solar eclipse on April 8. For approximately 4 minutes, we will experience total darkness in the middle of the afternoon. Totality enters the southwest corner of Shelby County at approximately 3:09 p.m. and exits the northeast corner of Shelby County around 3:14 p.m. Eclipse parties are scheduled throughout the county from backyards to the Sidney High School athletic complex. The last total solar eclipse this part of Ohio experienced was in 1806; the next one won't occur until 2099.




We know how to protect our eyes with solar viewers, and we know that traffic will be horrendous (100,000 people are expected to bombard Shelby County that day), but how does the eclipse affect plants and animals?

Our pets, mainly cats and dogs, probably will have little to no reaction unless they're part of a large gathering, such as at the Fairgrounds. And the darkness won't scare them as much as the throngs of people, especially if they're not used to crowds. Anxiety during storms is largely due to the noise coming from thunder, not the darkness. And cats and dogs have an instinctual tendency to avoid looking at the sun...unless they see their owners pointing and gesturing. If that's the case, NASA experts recommend keeping your pet indoors or fitting your pet with eclipse glasses. (Lots of luck with that.)

What about farm animals? Their likely reaction will be one of "getting ready for bed," although many will react to the rapid drop in temperature. The temperature can suddenly drop 10° to 15° during totality.

With wildlife, it's often a different story. In the minutes before totality, birds and insects will begin chirping and buzzing loudly. Then when totality hits, all is silent. Some birds will fly in unusual patterns until the sun is once again visible. Crickets, frogs, and toads begin singing if the weather is warm enough. Nocturnal animals, such as raccoons, opossums, bats, and skunks may begin their active search for food, while deer, rabbits, and squirrels might start preparing for sleep. Wolves and coyotes have been known to start their communicative howling. Spiders, orb weavers in particular, tear down their webs during totality and rebuild them when sunlight returns. Fish often start feeding more heavily during the hour before and the hour after totality. This has been documented repeatedly with large- and small-mouth bass.

Plants also react to a total solar eclipse. Because of the interruption of light, plants that are in the path of an eclipse have a loss of photosynthesis by an estimated 10-20%. One research team studied sagebrush during an eclipse. The team spokesperson said, "Over the course of the eclipse day, your average big sagebrush managed about 14 percent less photosynthesis than it would have if the sun hadn't been blocked. If a plant is already drought-stressed, an eclipse might be bad news, like losing 14 percent of a day's income when you're already broke." Houseplants in a normally sunny window may be stressed to the point of failure to thrive due to sudden loss of transpiration. Outdoor plant leaves droop, they release less water, and there are noticeable changes in the sap in trees—sometimes increased sap flow and sometimes decreased. With our unusually warm spring and this year's eclipse, buds on plants may open or close erratically. If plants in our zone were experiencing the eclipse during the summer, we would see moss roses, water lilies, and hibiscus close up during the totality. Night bloomers like evening primrose, nicotiana, and moonflower would open. Fortunately, totality lasts for only a few minutes and will not likely have an adverse effect on plants or animals.

So take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime event and enjoy the wonders of science and nature in our county. Share your observations with other Master Gardener Volunteers. 





## **Master Gardener 2024 Library Seminar Series**

The Master Gardeners of Shelby County invite you to our 2024 Garden Seminar Series. Each seminar will be on the second Thursday of the month, March through September. The seminars will be held in the meeting room on the first floor of the Amos Memorial Library from 6:30-7:45pm, except for the March 14 meeting, which will be held downstairs. Here is a list of this year's seminars:

### **March 14: "Grow your Own"**

Master Gardener Jim McCracken will show how to grow plants from seeds in early spring using various techniques, which include using grow lights, warming pads, and other cool weather methods to start your garden early.

### **April 11: "Natives: Why and How"**

Dave McPheron, owner of Star Farms Native Plants in Kenton, Ohio, will discuss native plants that will grow well in our area. This timely presentation will give ideas to create beautiful gardens this spring.

### **May 9: "Going to Pot"**

Angie Frantom and Courtney Diltz from Sidney's Crossway Farms will demonstrate techniques to create beautiful garden container pots for your summer garden. They will give tips to keep these and other bloomers looking gorgeous all summer.

### **June 13: "Thyme Began in a Garden"**

Master Gardener Janet Nelson will give a presentation about growing and using herbs. Janet has years of experience growing herbs and using them in delicious foods and beverages. Learn her secrets!

### **July 12: No seminar this month!**

See us at the Shelby County Fair in late July.

### **August 8: "Let's Think Spring!"**

Master Gardener Ann Heeley will give ideas to plant bulbs this fall for beautiful flowers in the spring of 2025. She will give tips on what bulbs to plant, and how to plant them for a lovely spring view you will enjoy.

### **September 12: "Mopheads, Lace-caps, and Oakleaf Hydrangeas"**

Dianne Wells, who has had much success growing beautiful hydrangeas in her garden here in Sidney, will give us key information on how to make an amazing garden using hydrangeas in the landscape.