

Shelby County Master Gardener

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



Volume 30, Issue 3—April 2025



President's comments—

By Dave Slagle

Hello, Master Gardeners!

It is kind of good to be back in Ohio. I think someone forgot to tell Mother Nature that it is supposed to be warm outside. I'm sure it will get better soon, and we all are anticipating that. There is frost in my backyard this morning, Wednesday.

We are beginning to see and hear the lawn mowers out working, and that means the chore is every week from now on.

Doug and Riley Kay and committees have been working to put together many programs for all our benefits. That also goes for Mercer County.

Looking forward to seeing all next week at our regular monthly meeting. Many thanks for Janet for filling in for me while I was enjoying the Florida weather. 🌿

Program Coordinator's comments

By Doug Benson

Truly strange weather! One day it's nearly 80; the next day it's 40. One night my lawn is underwater; the next night it's covered with snow. This morning as I write this. The sun is shining brightly, yet the thermometer shows the temperature still in the 20s. One has to wonder what the effects of all of this variability will be on our plants. Will buds on the fruit

trees survive these freezing temperatures, or will we have to depend on the farmers' markets and the grocery stores for our peaches, apples, cherries and other tree fruits this coming summer? Once again, we're reminded how powerful Mother Nature is and how difficult she is to manage.

Despite the unpredictability of the weather, we need to keep moving ahead with our MGTV activities. Our first library seminar was a rousing success thanks to the planning and excellent presentation by

Judy Westerheide. We received several positive comments about how well organized and clear her presentation was. By the time you read this newsletter, Rylee Kay will have made her presentation about some invasive plants and the dangers they present. I'm looking forward to the rest of the programs that will follow in the coming months. I hope that we will continue to have good attendance, especially from those who are not Master Gardeners. Thanks to all the members of the committee and the volunteers who are helping to organize and present the programs.

In less than a month, we will begin formal operation of our hotline. We have already begun to receive various calls and requests for information. It seems that the word is getting out to the public, as many of the calls have been related to soil testing. The two-part training program sponsored by our office and the Soil and Water Conservation office was well received, and a number of homeowners we'll be benefiting from the results of the tests they submitted. I anticipate that interest in gardening is going to continue to grow and will result in more people seeking information. I hope that many of you will sign up to take a turn working the hotline sometime during the summer.

A stroll through our Memorial Garden shows that many of our plants have survived, at least thus far. I hope these cold nights will not inhibit further development. Unfortunately, many weeds are also reappearing and thriving. Hopefully, the weather will improve, and we'll get some pleasant dry days so that we can schedule a garden cleanup. In the meantime, I noticed this week that with the damp soil some of the weeds are easy to pull by hand; the problem is there are too many of them for one person to deal with. Between now and the scheduled cleanup (whenever that happens to be), feel free to stop by and pull a few weeds. It'll make it much easier when we do have the cleanup. I did mow the grass for the first time this afternoon. (continued to page 2)

Next Meeting: April 16th, 2 pm
& on Zoom, at OSU Extension

(Continuation of Program Coordinator comments.)

Two of our committees have been busy collecting information and doing some planning, and I look forward to hearing their reports at our upcoming meeting. The committee developing plans for field trips will have a recommendation for an upcoming activity. They've also been discussing other possible trips later in this summer. Meanwhile, the committee studying plans for our annual banquet have also been gathering information about possible venues. They are considering the quality of the food and service, convenience, and costs. I look forward to hearing their reports and recommendations, if any.

In other business, I don't have anything to report about the county fair yet, as we have not had a meeting. I've not heard anything about what's going on with the Conservation Day Camp either. A week ago, I sent out information about purchasing Master Gardener apparel and other items. Keep in mind that the deadline for ordering is Monday, May 5. All items are subject to our local sales tax, which you can calculate on the order form. Payment must be made with your order. If you're writing a check, be sure that you write it **payable to OSU Extension Shelby County**. You can mail it to the extension office, (810 Fair Road, Sidney OH 45365) or you can drop it off at the extension office. Be sure to double-check your order, as there will be no refunds except for defects.

And as always, I'll end my article with a plea for everyone to attend the meetings in person if possible, and be active in our organization. Continue reporting your hours in Hands On Connect, and take advantage of the various continuing education opportunities that are offered either online or in person. Finally, keep healthy and enjoy your gardening activities. 🌱



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Garden Planning from a different perspective



Virginia Bluebells make a new addition to the MG Memorial Garden

The Virginia bluebell rhizomes that we planted during the fall cleanup with the drill planter auger are up and blooming this spring. There are about 12 plants to the right of the extension building's front doors.

We'll need to keep a watchful eye on them as they are prolific spreaders from seed. We can always round them up and replant back in this area. Another good thing is that they usually attract bumblebees. 🐝



Look familiar?



“To Do or Not to Do, That is the Question”

By Janet Nelson

Are you the gardener that cleans up, cuts down, trims and rakes the garden each fall? Or are you more inclined to let things set until spring? What are the pros and cons to each scenario? My grandson, Jacob, and I recently had this conversation. It began with his lamenting over not “cleaning” the landscape this past fall. Keep in mind; he is a husband, father of two little ones, owner of a 1970s ish home, a huge dog and full time engineer. As we conversed, I tried to encourage him of the pros to his decision (or lack of) to keeping the landscape untidy for winter.

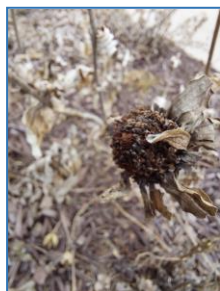
The chat with my grandson let me to some research. When the fall cleanup is avoided we are able to enjoy the ‘bones’ of the garden and ‘architecture’ of dormant shrubs and perennials, Perhaps even more importantly it allows native pollinators and other wildlife to survive the winter.

There are many animals hibernating during Ohio winters. But some small critters including rabbits and tree squirrels inhabit our gardens year-around. And let’s not forget the birds According to OSU’s Marne Titchenell, many birds like chickadees, cardinals, blue jays, and white-breasted nuthatches overwinter in Ohio. She reports that some birds actually travel to Ohio to spend the winter, like the dark-eyed junco. Others, like the great-horned owl, begin nesting during winter, with eggs laid as early as January!

According to the [Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation](#), “The availability of nesting and overwintering habitat is one of the most important factors influencing populations of native bees and other beneficial insects.” In addition, the [Clemson Cooperative Extension](#) explains that, “Fireflies, who are beetles, live the bulk of their lives (95%) as larva in leaf litter, under rotting logs, and in moist areas where they can thrive.”

What can be done to help the wildlife in the Ohio winter garden? Here are the suggestions that I found.

1. Leave the leaves, branches, and brush in place. Many creatures seek refuge from the bitter cold by burrowing into piles of small branches. Branches should be piled loosely and brush (leaves and grass) stashed in layers so animals can easily burrow into the pile to make a winter nest. Leaves raked



off the grass can be relocated to the flowerbeds or the vegetable garden. This provides mulch for overwintering perennials, and provides winter habitats for tiny animals.

2. Snow-covered dormant perennials and ornamental grasses not only provide a lovely winter garden vista, they provide cover and food for small mammals. Leave dried flowering plants such as black-eyed Susan’s, and coneflowers standing. In addition, the ornamental grasses can remain in place until spring to provide both shelter and food from their seed heads.



3. Conifers and evergreens with their dense branches and snow-covered needles provide thermal cover. Even low-growing evergreen shrubs, such as hollies, and evergreen groundcovers provide protection from predators. Densely branched deciduous bushes that have winter berries provide both food and perches for critters.



4. Adding a bird feeder with seed will result in at least one or more types of birds taking advantage of the food source. Marne Titchenell recommends stocking feeders with high quality and nutritious foods, such as black oil sunflower seeds, safflower seeds, thistle seed, and suet. And do not forget water. A heated birdbath is a wise investment.

Wildlife uses our garden spaces and by gardening thoughtfully and purposefully, we can contribute to the overall health and numbers of beneficial insects and other wildlife. As Jacob and I finished our conversation, he says, “Oh yeah Grandma, I planned that all along!” 😊



IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT PLANTING ONE OF THESE, THINK AGAIN

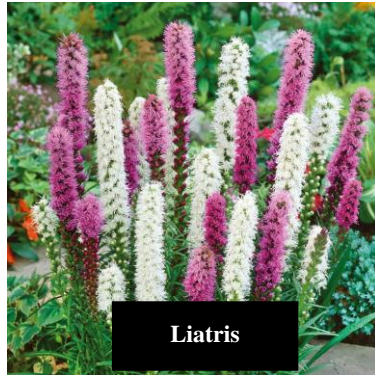
By Ann Heeley

Have you ever planted a perennial only to spend the next 5 years trying to get rid of it? The first year I planted some of the villains listed below, I was pleasantly surprised to find how they fit right in with their neighbors. The second year, as they began to spread beyond their assigned location, I was able to dig out the offenders. By the third year, some had not only choked out their neighbors, they had begun growing yards away from where they were first planted. It was then I realized that I had not done adequate background checks into these invasive monsters.

First on my list of “Least Wanted” is the dreaded Obedient Plant (*Physostegia virginiana*). Its runners will travel far and wide to form new plants through moist or rock-hard soil, gravel, lawns, and holes in metal edging. And their spread is remarkably fast. Don't let anyone give you this plant. Instead try Blazing Star (*Liatris spicata*) or False Indigo (*Baptisia australis*).

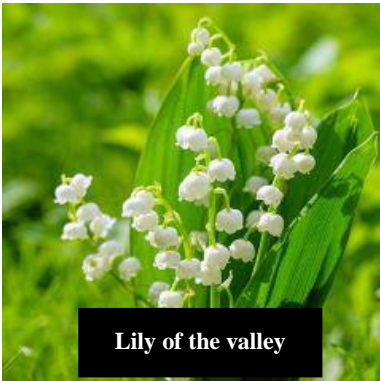


Obedient plant



Liatris

Next, or maybe tied for first place, is Lily of the Valley (*Convallaria majalis*). Remember the movie “What About Bob?” where Bob makes himself at home with his psychiatrist's family at their country home? Bob never leaves, no matter what obstacles are thrown in his path. Well, that's Lily of the Valley. It shrugs off Roundup and assorted brush killers. Trying to dig it out means that even a tiny piece of root left in the soil will grow into a new plant. It crowds out anything in its way, and even barriers cut 6" below ground level will not halt its advance. STOP before you consider adding this plant to any part of your yard or garden. Great alternatives include Foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*), Trillium, and Canada Mayflower (*Mianthemum canadense*).



Lily of the valley



Tiarella or Foamflower



Canada Mayflower

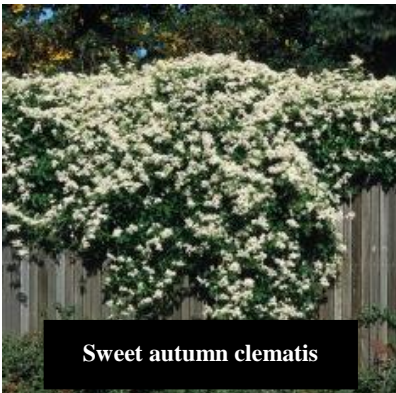
And then there's Bugleweed (*Ajuga*). There are several different varieties, including a very pretty Chocolate with purple flowers. The problem is that like Obedient Plant and Lily of the Valley, Bugleweed's runners pop up everywhere during their second year and are extremely difficult to control. They're easy to pull out of the ground, but do you really want to spend hours on your hands and knees yanking out baby Bugleweeds before they run rampant? Instead, try White Wood Aster (*Aster divaricatus* 'Eastern Star'), a non-invasive, low-maintenance perennial.



Bugleweed



White wood aster



Sweet autumn clematis

Let's talk about Sweet Autumn Clematis (*Clematis paniculata* 'Sweet Autumn'). Fragrant? Yes. Easy to grow? Absolutely. Can cover a 5-foot fence or trellis in a single season? No problem. Invasive? You betcha. Toward the end of its blooming period, what you'll be looking at will remind you of a giant version of Einstein's ragged hair. And then you'll see it again the following year in places where you never planted it. Any other variety of Clematis can be grown in its place. *Jackmanii* is an old and very reliable variety that never fails to produce an abundance of gorgeous, purple blooms.



Jackmanii clematis

I'll be back next month with 4 more losers. Meanwhile keep your eyes open for the greenhouses and nurseries in our area that have opened or will soon open this month. Happy Gardening! 🌱