

# Shelby County Master Gardener

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



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## Getting through Ohio Winters

By Janet Nelson, Vice President

Ohio winters are reliably unreliable. We cannot go outside to “play in the dirt” but we can find ways to tolerate these crazy days. Some of us move to a warmer climate. Since I stay here for the winter, these are the things that help me endure the winter months.

Reminiscing about last year’s garden helps me in planning for the new garden season. Have you ever caught yourself browsing through photos or notes of your garden? What worked? What didn’t? What changes do I put into action this spring? Much time is spent in perusing the seed catalogs. Not to mention websites. The “Proven Winners” “Garden Design” is one of my favorites.

Completing online webinars contributes to my education hours but also helps get the “spring” back in my step. Doug does a splendid job sending us webinar and in-person education opportunities. Personally I am excited for the “Art of Gardening” Seminar coming up in March. And then there is the planning for 2025. Many of us are helping with plans for the Library Series/ Garden Talks. This gives us the chance to talk gardening with fellow enthusiast.

Some of you may start seeds indoors. This provides the option to garden indoors during the cooler weather but also lets you choose the varieties and plants that are best for you. Again, this year I am growing microgreens indoors. What a treat to have fresh greens!! A new adventure is growing from kitchen scraps. Currently the



green onions are doing very well, producing greens for the last 3 weeks. In addition, celery and romaine are growing new leaves. Doubt that I get an entire salad but it is fun trying something new.



There is much information online about growing from kitchen scraps.

What do you do to get through the cold days of winter? Please share with us. 🌱

## Program Coordinator’s comments

By Doug Benson

Well, here we are back again. I hope you have had a restful and rewarding time off and an enjoyable holiday season. Our weather has been interesting, to say the least – sub-zero wind chills one week and spring-like weather the next. As the saying goes, “It’s **OHIO!**”

As we begin a new year, I’d like to take a quick look back at this past year. I think we had a successful year highlighted by having Rylee Kay join the Extension staff and become our new leader. Her enthusiasm and new ideas are benefiting our organization greatly. We had a successful library program in spite of some of the challenges that the weather posed. We increased our knowledge by completing 496 hours of continuing education activities. We recorded 1920 volunteer hours, and I suspect that more hours were provided and not recorded. We recorded 48 hotline contacts, and I know that we actually had more contacts than that. We had displays at the Shelby, Auglaize and Mercer County fairs; and had youth activities at both Shelby and Mercer fairs. Once again, we helped with the conservation day camp it also presented several other programs with kids. With support from the Shelby County Commissioners, we undertook a major renovation project in the Memorial Garden. I think everyone will agree that our field trip to Celina was a very rewarding experience. Finally, I want to recognize by name Carol Strayer for her efforts to edit ten excellent newsletters; and I want to thank many of you for contributing materials for her to use.

As we begin a new year, I hope that we can build on what we have accomplished in the past. A committee of volunteers has already planned a new series of library seminars, which will begin next month. (Continued to page 2)

Next Meeting: February 19th, 2 pm  
& on Zoom, at OSU Extension

| MG Officers & Leadership for 2025 |                   |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| President                         | Dave Slagle       |
| Vice President                    | Janet Nelson      |
| Secretary                         | Russ Stewart      |
| Treasurer                         | Missy Frazier     |
| Volunteer Coordinator             | Doug Benson       |
| Extension ANR Educator            | Rylee Kay Puthoff |

## (Program Coordinator's comments continued)

We will be exploiting the knowledge and talent of our own members to present each of the programs, and I encourage all of you to come and support them. I encourage each of you to find opportunities to share your knowledge and skills with the public and your fellow members. One way to do this is to come in and staff the hotline. Even if there are no calls or problems to be solved, it's a chance to visit with other volunteers and perhaps answer questions related to your own gardens. Another way to share knowledge is something that Rylee Kay and so many of our officers discussed in a meeting during our time off. That is to have short 15-to-20-minute continuing education programs at the start of each of our business meetings. We will ask volunteers to develop brief presentations, which will give them an opportunity to practice speaking to a group as well as helping all of us learn something about a different topic each month. We will have more to say about this during the meeting next week.



The Memorial Garden is our featured project. We've spent lots of time and money planning and planting; now we need to do a better job of maintaining it. I know all too well the challenges that weeding, deadheading and judicious pruning present as we continue to mature. I also know from experience that the job becomes much more difficult if we don't keep up. We need to come up with a plan that involves more volunteers on a regular schedule. I'm open to suggestions.

In contrast to the work that's involved with the Memorial Garden, I hope that we can do some less stressful activities. The field trip to Celina was an enjoyable activity. Let's see if we can find a destination for a field trip this year - perhaps a garden, a garden center, or a nature preserve. If there's interest, I'd like a small committee to work on plans for such an activity. In a similar vein, some members have hosted meetings at their own homes. This gives them a chance to share what they're doing and give the rest of us ideas (thanks, Karen). I know this involves a lot of work so no one should feel obligated. It's just a thought.

We need to focus on a few other things. Please continue to submit information, articles and pictures to Carol for the newsletter. Continue to record your volunteer and continuing education hours in Hands On Connect. If you become aware of a continuing education opportunity that others might be interested in, let me know so that I can pass it on to the group. We need to publicize our existence and let the public know the services that we can provide, so be thinking of ways that we can get our name out to the public.

We need to grow our membership, so if you become aware of someone who might be interested in becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer, let us know. Last year a class was planned; but when it came time to sign up, no one did. I have some good news and some bad news about our membership. The good news is that Kari Thompson has completed her graduate studies at West Virginia University and will be returning to active membership. Welcome back, Kari. The bad news is that Harry Homan and Suzann Lonsbury have both elected to move to inactive status this year. Harry and Suzann, we will miss you. Stay in touch.

As usual, I've said way more than I intended to. I look forward to seeing you either in person or on Zoom at our meeting on Wednesday, February the 19th, at 2:00 at the Extension office. Until then, keep safe and warm and healthy. 🍀

### Starting Fresh for 2025

By Rylee Kay Puthoff  
ANR Educator



Hello everyone! I am looking forward to seeing you all again in February! It has been a busy winter and I am excited to get the season started. I wanted to give you all some thoughts, hopes, and expectations I have for this year. Over the winter, I have been talking with Doug and some others and something I want you all to focus on a few things. One of them is to work to become a better teacher. I challenge all of you to try to teach one of the many small, "flash talks" given at the monthly meetings. Step out of your comfort zone and try something new! I want you to think of how you would like to get more involved with the Master Gardener Program and get involved in 1 new activity this year. Try a new volunteer opportunity or program or sit for the hotline. Something else I would love to see is more people working on the hotline! It is very helpful to those in our community to have a place to turn to when they have questions. I hope that you can do at least one of these challenges for this coming year.

Some activities I hope to have this year include an educational field trip, a teaching session for MGVs, and who knows what else? I want to encourage you to let me know if you have any ideas for a program, field trip, or volunteer opportunity. You are a part of the community, and you know best what it needs! I know I have said it a lot, but please feel free to reach out to me if you have questions or ideas. I want to work with you and see what we can make happen! See you soon! 🍀

Rylee Kay Puthoff

Extension Educator, Agriculture & Natural Resources

Ohio State University Extension - Shelby County

810 Fair Rd., Sidney, OH 45365 (937) 419-7126 Office

[puthoff.84@osu.edu](mailto:puthoff.84@osu.edu) <https://shelby.osu.edu/> [Join the Newsletter](#)

## All Because of Broccoli – Winter Seed Sowing By Nancy Russell

For several years now, I have started broccoli from seed under a little grow light. My reason was the frustration of having to wait to buy broccoli transplants when all the greenhouses opened in late April early May. This didn't allow enough time for the plants to mature for harvesting when the first signs of cabbage worm infestation would appear. By the time the plants came to fruition in June, I was tired of covering them with light cloth or had to use an insecticide, which I didn't like, to get rid of the caterpillars. I'm sure I ate a "little protein" along the way when I did harvest. Anyway, this method of growing my own plants was my go-to method for a long time. That is until I learned about winter seed sowing and decided to give it a try last year and again this year after a few adjustments on what I learned.

### Getting Started

The equipment needed to get started were, for the most part, easily found around my house. Containers suggested to use were gallon plastic jugs – for example, those containing milk and distilled water – as well as clear plastic containers that once held berries or spinach. I preferred the gallon jugs because as the plants grew taller there was room for their height. After washing and drying the containers, I punched drainage holes and a few holes for ventilation using an old paring knife. There is no need to save the caps.



The next steps involved writing the seed information, date of plantings, and marking the cutting line around the container. Since I mentioned earlier I used what I had on hand, the seed name, variety, and date were written using a sharpie pen instead of the markers that don't fade. It was also suggested in the literature that this information be written on the inside of the container and to use plant tags in case the information faded in the sun. I did the tags last year, but didn't feel the need to do it this year since I only had a few plantings and was very careful keeping everything organized.



Cutting the containers so they hinged was the next step. Using an item that was about 4" tall – I used a juice glass – I laid the marker on the glass and rotated the jug marking a cutting line. Then cut open the jug following the line marking but stopping at the container's handle to create a "flip top."

Now the planting part. Whatever potting soil I had on hand is what I used. This was the same method I used when I grew seeds under the grow light except this time,



I didn't allow the soil to warm to room temperature. Something I would do in the past. The seeds I

experimented planting two different ways: broadcasting across the surface and planting in a row configuration. I prefer the latter layout and did that this year for the plantings I have so far. Once planted to the depth suggested on the packet, cover lightly with soil and gently tamp down.

The final steps were providing moisture and sealing the lid. I sprayed the plantings with water and sealed the cut



seam by punching holes and inserting twist ties to hold tight the lid. Take the plantings outside and place in a spot that



gets 6 or more hours of sunlight and out of high winds. After a week check moisture levels – container will feel light – I would then bottom water. Place jug in a pan of water for about 30 minutes.

### What I Learned

There were several things I learned that needing improvement this year. For one, I started too late. It was the middle to late February before I was able to sow the seeds. The broccoli, spinach, kale and carrots I planted needed to be started after Christmas to early January.



I was not prepared when it came to choosing the seeds. Because my garden is small, I prefer dwarf varieties and most retail stores don't carry those. I was delayed getting started because I had to order what I wanted.

## All Because of Broccoli – Winter Seed Sowing By Nancy Russell (Continued)

I had varying degrees of success with the plantings. Kale was the only one that did extremely well. My beloved broccoli only got to the crown stage before I had trouble with cabbage worms. The carrots I carefully planted in small groups and planned to separate the bunches with a knife. The literature made it look easy but it wasn't. I won't even talk about the spinach! I also don't think I had the best location. Because of the mild winter last year, I was afraid of the containers becoming too warm so I used an east location and don't believe there was enough light.

This year I sealed the containers with duct tape and not twist ties. I found I didn't need to open the containers until I saw emerging seedlings.

### Conclusion

This year I changed up my vegetable choices: two kinds of lettuce, spinach and of course, broccoli. Everything was planted in early January and the containers are on the south side of the house. So excited was I to try it again that I have done some reading on starting some flowers this way. I will have to let you know! 🌱

## THE GREAT PROCRASTINATOR By Ann Heeley

That's me. And no, I'm not proud to admit it, but too often than not, my brilliant ideas and grand plans wind up in a folder with no expiration date. For example, as the gardening catalogues come in the mail and page corners are turned down to mark plants or seeds I MUST order, they are buried in a stack.



As the stack mounts, the ordering deadlines for best prices or free shipping are likewise buried.

So this year, instead of regrets about what might have been, I'm jotting down ideas of what went wrong and what went right last year in order to take charge of my forgetful impulses.

The baby new potatoes I planted in a grow bag were terrific! But I planted them too late to take advantage of a fully mature harvest, and some were only pea-size. This time, I vow to get them in grow bags no later than mid-April.

My garlic was planted in mid-October, again in a grow bag with nice, loose potting mix, and I'm looking forward to pulling out those fat bulbs in June or July. A few years ago, I planted them in the ground and

struggled to dig them out of the hardened clay. Lesson learned.

Begin looking for lacebugs and their nymphs on the undersides of my azalea leaves in early May and treat with Neem oil every 2 weeks if I spot them. Joe Boggs mentions spraying under the leaves with plain water to dislodge them, but that doesn't kill the eggs that have overwintered in the ground. He also says to avoid systemics or anything with imidacloprid, if possible, to protect pollinators. Last year, I lost one of my azaleas due to a severe infestation of lacebugs and barely saved 3 other plants.

Fertilize trees, shrubs, and most perennials in the spring, even before the last frost. This gives the fertilizer a chance to work its way down to the root system and give a boost to new growth. I was pretty erratic in my fertilization schedule last year, and it showed.

Cut back on the number and variety of seeds I start indoors. While I thoroughly enjoy starting plants from seed, I tend to go overboard. By the time, the young plants are ready to go outdoors; I find that I don't have the space or time to plant them. As a result, I wind up selling them at a plant sale or giving them away. But maybe that's not all bad either.

Continue to grow heirloom tomatoes while reducing the number of purple tomato plants. I had 3 purple tomato plants, and they each produced at least 2 gallons of juicy veggies. I couldn't keep up. I was giving away or throwing out so much more than I had anticipated. And as any dedicated gardener knows, it hurts to throw away perfectly good produce. 😞

The sweet bell peppers (mostly red) that I planted took forever to turn color, but they were amazing. They were among the plants that I started from seed and transplanted outdoors in late June. Definitely too late.

Shredded leaves combined with shredded paper made great mulch. This combo deserves a repeat performance for the blueberries, tomatoes, and sweet peppers in containers.

Continue feeding tomatoes and peppers with diluted milk. I experimented last year with a few of the plants getting regular fertilizer only and the rest getting both fertilizer and milk. While I can't conclude that the results represent a scientific certitude, the milked plants' vegetables were visibly larger, healthier, and more prolific.

But wait...there's more. Due to procrastination, however, I have to send in this article by the deadline. And that's now. 🌱

## What to do in the garden in February

By Karen Seger

February is the perfect time to start getting the garden ready for spring. Yes, it's still cold and wintery outside but subtle signs of spring are starting to show.

If you are wondering what to do in the garden this month, read on for ten essential gardening jobs for February.

1. Tidy your shed. This month is less about planting and more about prepping your garden for spring. Use this month to tidy up! Get rid of anything you do not need and reorganize your gardening tools.

2. Test old seeds. If you are wondering if leftover seeds from last year are still viable, there's a simple test to find out. Place 10 seeds in a paper towel and slightly moisten. Place the bag in a warm place out of direct sunlight. Check in a week and count how many seeds germinated. If it's less than 80%, buy new seeds. Organize your seed storage.

3. Treat wooden furniture. This is the perfect time to give them a light sand and treat with Danish oil. Make sure to do in dry weather.

4. Clean your tools. Give them a good scrub and lubricate.

5. Control houseplant insect pests. Wash the leaves periodically to remove insects and spray with a safe organic spray such as Neem oil. Quarantine the plant for a few weeks to be sure the pests do not come back.

6. Save amaryllis bulbs. After the bulb has finished flowering, don't throw it out. Grow the amaryllis in a sunny window. In spring move it outdoors to a partly sunny location and water and fertilize regularly. In fall, cut back the foliage, stop watering, and place in a cool, dark room for 8 weeks. Then bring it out to a sunny warm room and it will grow and bloom again.

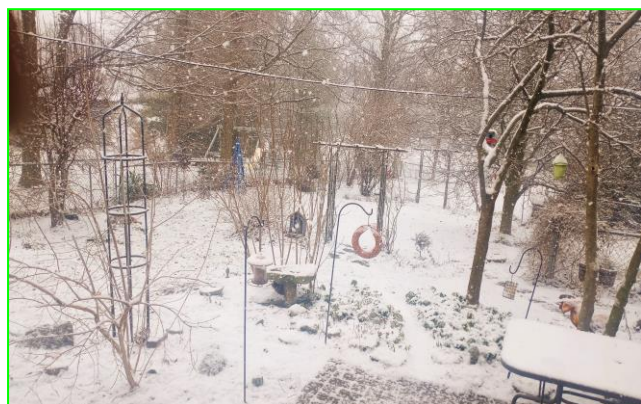
7. Cut back leggy geraniums. If you are growing geraniums in a window, chances are the stems are getting leggy due to lack of

sunlight this time of year. Cut them back periodically to keep the plant stocky.

8. Get rid of weeds. Dig out weeds and make sure to remove the roots to make it harder for them to return. Don't forget to turn your compost heap.

9. Order new seeds. Try winter sowing with the "milk jug" method.

10. Prune any dead, damaged and diseased branches. You may prune deciduous trees and shrubs 4-6 weeks before the last frost. Look up your species to be sure. 🌱



*Karen's Winter Garden*

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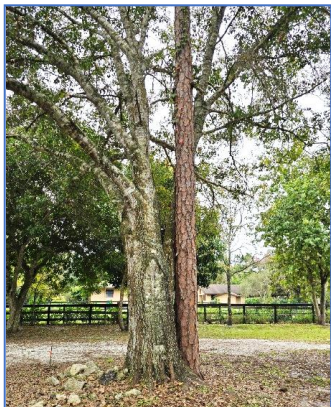
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Newsletter Editor: Carol Strayer, email: [carolstrayer@yahoo.com](mailto:carolstrayer@yahoo.com)

## Camping Trip to Loxahatchee, Florida

By Pam Wagner

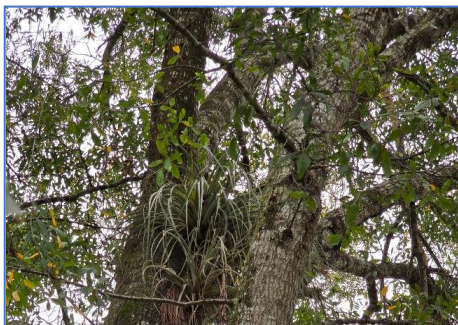
We spent two weeks at our friend's place in Loxahatchee, Florida. We were in the middle of horse country and also surrounded by many nurseries. We were there in mid-January. Temperature highs were 67-78 with lows in the 50's.

They told us about two protected trees that they have on their property. They need tree permits and assessments to remove any trees from their property. These two trees are protected in this area with very high fines if you remove them.



Sand Pine – *pinus clausa* and Live Oak *Quercus virginiana*

This picture shows the two growing together



We also noted other plants growing on an Oak tree.



And a cactus plant growing on a palm tree.



The beautiful Royal Palms-*Roystonea* spp.

Notably popular as street or specimen trees, Royal Palms make a neat, tidy, yet stately landscape element for large landscapes, often reaching 50 to 100 feet in height in almost as many years. The tall, smooth, cement grey trunks are capped with a glossy, green crown shaft several feet high and a beautiful, broad, dense crown of soft, gently drooping, feathery fronds. Flowers are incredibly fragrant, even from 50 feet away and are produced periodically throughout the year but mostly in summer. The old fronds should be removed before they drop since they can cause injury or damage to plants or property when allowed to fall. One frond will fall about every month.



Carambola, star fruit



We enjoyed several of these. If purchased in the grocery they are green and not nearly as big.

Star fruit, or carambola, is a unique tropical fruit grown in central Florida. It may not survive very cold winters, but it will come back from the roots if it is killed (if it is not a grafted tree). Star fruit are native to Southeast Asia, but older varieties have been grown in Florida for over 100 years. The newer cultivars are sweeter than the tart older ones, but they are all tasty in my opinion.

The trees are evergreen, although they may lose a few leaves in our cold during the winter. They can grow to 20-30 feet tall with single or multiple trunks, but regular pruning will keep them at picking height. The flowers are pink to lavender colored, but not that obvious. In 60 to 75 days you should have fruit from the flowers. The fruit are fleshy and yellow with a thin, waxy, delicate skin that does not need to be peeled. Seeds are small and edible. The fruits are crisp and a good source of vitamins C and A, phosphorus, and potassium. Slices of the fruit look like stars, thus the star fruit name. The fruit can be eaten fresh, made into pickles, or frozen into fancy ice cubes among other uses. I like them fresh or pickled topping a salad. Please note that people with kidney disease should not eat the fruit unless their doctor says it is safe because of the high oxalic acid in them.

We also visited several preserves and a Wildlife Refuge with marshes, swamp and wildlife:

- Wellington Environmental Preserve which was a 10 minute drive
- Peaceful Waters Sanctuary – about 20 minutes
- Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge about 45 minutes

Maybe another article to come about these 😊 🌿