

The American Toad

By Janet Nelson, Vice President 2025

Gardeners share their gardens with beneficial insects, and predators. We grow plants to attract the pollinators and are very creative at deterring the bigger animals. But one animal that is often forgotten is the American Toad. Yes, the toad is kind of cute, in a lumpy, warty way, but they are also a valuable asset to the garden.

The American Toad is the toad most often seen in our area. It is located throughout the eastern U.S., from New England down to Tennessee. Toads are amphibians and closely related to frogs. Unlike aquatic frogs, toads are adapted to live in drier land environments. They have dry skin, rounded bodies, blunt noses and short legs that they walk and hop on. Most have tan, brown or gray coloration to blend in with soil, fallen leaves and rocks. But it can also be red with light patches, olive, or gray. The bellies are a white or yellow color. The toad's skin color can change depending on temperature, humidity, and stress. And yes, they have bumps (often referred to as warts) that contain glands that produce a poisonous milky fluid, providing these toads with excellent protection from many of their predators.

Water is necessary for breeding. The female American toad can lay between 4,000 to 8,000 eggs at a time. Eggs are laid in two rows of jelly-like long spiral tubes. It takes between 3 to 14 days for eggs to hatch, depending on temperature.

Toads are strictly carnivorous. They feed on beetles, slugs crickets, flies, ants and other invertebrates. One American toad is capable of eating up to 1,000 insects in one day! They are a natural pest control and the gardener will benefit from a healthy toad population on their property.

American toads are mainly nocturnal. They are most active when the weather is warm and humid. During the day, American toads hide under rocks or logs or dig into dead leaves and soil.

As you can see from the photo, my toad digs in near the water spigot. Gardeners can encourage toad population by leaving leaves on the ground and building brush piles. These leaves and branches are also beneficial because the toad hibernates over the winter.



Other interesting facts:

- The toad evolves from tadpole to toadlet to toad.
- Garter snakes are immune to the toad toxin secreted from their glands.
- Toads live for about 10 years. It is recorded that a toad lived 36 years in captivity.
- During the mating season, the American Toad's call is distinctive and unique. Females are able to hear the slight differences between males.
- The eye position allows them to see nearly 360 degrees without moving their head.
- The toad's tongue is fast and the saliva is thick and sticky to facilitate the capture of its prey.

Perhaps in our winter planning, we can think about creating an environment to encourage the support of the American Toad. *Maybe* for the many benefits as listed above or *maybe* because, the toad is kind of cute, in a lumpy, warty way. 😊🐸

MG Banquet: October 15th
6:00 pm

MG Officers & Leadership for 2026

President	Nancy Russell
Vice President	Karen Seger
Secretary	Becky Francis
Treasurer	Missy Francis
Volunteer Coordinator	Doug Benson
Extension ANR Educator	Rylee Kay Puthoff

Program Coordinator's comments

By Doug Benson

Finally, some rain! It's about 10:00 Tuesday morning, and I just checked my rain gauge. It shows somewhere around 0.3 to 0.4 inches. That's a start, but we need a lot more. It should be enough to keep the broadleaf weeds growing so that I can apply some post-emergent weed control to get rid of the ground Ivy (AKA creeping Charlie) that is rampant in my lawn. I wanted to kill some of the nimblewill and reseed, but the lack of rain made that impractical. I'll have to wait until next spring. I have a couple pepper plants that are still producing, but as soon as they're done, I'm done with the vegetables for the year. For those of you who are still growing vegetables this fall, more power to you. Don't forget the Grow Ohio food bank program if you have leftovers. Late Flash: At 11:00 Tuesday evening, it's 0.9 inches!

The bulk of our Master Gardener activities for 2025 are just about complete. The hotline is done, the county fairs are over, and our library programs and the cut flower workshop were completed successfully. Thanks to all who helped to make those and other activities like Conservation Day Camp a success.

But wait! We still have a few more things to do. The banquet is just around the corner, and just a week and a half later we have the Forestry Field Day at Tawawa Park on Sunday, October 26. Some of our members are putting together activities to offer to the kids in attendance, and anyone who would like to join in the fun is welcome. Contact Teresa F. or me. I plan to have our display board up along with a few fact sheets and possibly some packages of buckeyes with planting and growing instructions. If you have access to some FRESH buckeyes, I could use a few hundred. Bring them to the office by Wednesday, October 22. Last, but not least, we still have a final clean-up of the Memorial Garden. Watch your email for an announcement of the time and date.

We're already off to a good start for 2026. Thanks to Nancy Russell – president, Karen Seger – vice president, Becky Francis – secretary, and Missy Francis – treasurer, we selected our new officers with relative ease. Thanks to their predecessors Dave Slagle, Janet Nelson, and Russ Stewart for leaving the organization in good condition. Using her experiences and insights, Missy will bring stability to the treasurer position. For the first time that I can recall, I don't have to send out any dues reminders, as Missy indicates that everyone has paid. One negative note is that we are losing two members; Kari Thompson is transferring to Logan County (which is where she lives), and Pam Wagner has elected to resign to pursue family and other interests. Both will be missed.

I will have more 2025 reviews and 2026 previews coming in the November newsletter, if Carol plans to do one. Otherwise, I will use email. A couple topics I want to mention now are “recertification” for 2026 and final hours reports. Recertification will begin December 1 and end December 31. The state MGV office wants us to have our 2025 volunteer and continuing education hours entered in HOC by December 15. You will get plenty of reminders as the time draws near.

In the meantime, take advantage of the improving weather to get caught up on your gardening tasks. I hope to see many of you at the banquet, and be watching for the Memorial Garden clean-up call. 🌱

Master Gardener Volunteer Surveys

By Rylee Kay Puthoff
ANR Educator

Hello everyone!

Doug and I sat through the monthly Master Gardener coordinators meeting, and we have some surveys we would like you to take a look at. The first is the MGV Spotlight survey. This is a way for you to share your story about why you became a Master Gardener, and it will likely be posted on social media. [MGV Spotlight](#)

The second survey to participate in is the Technology Survey, which asks questions regarding your comfort and capabilities of using technology. The state program will use this information to better the programs and understand all of you more. [Technology Survey](#)

The final survey is a fun one that wants to know what is in your gardening bag. What are your favorite tools of the trade? [What's in Your Gardening Bag?](#)

Also, keep an eye out for the [New MGV Periodical: Pressed for Thyme!](#) This will come out as needed and will give helpful information and updates from the state program. This will be sent directly to your email, so please keep an eye out for that.

I know that is a lot of information, but please let Doug or me know if you have any questions. Have a great weekend.

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

Planting Health

By Karen Seger



house plants

If winter leaves you feeling cooped up, houseplants may be your key to brighter days.

Those seemingly innocuous plants grow with a wide array of health benefits, according to numerous studies. Even NASA has researched the pluses of a simple ivy plant. The findings highlight those benefits.

Cleaner air: NASA scientists famously found in the 1980's that basic houseplants provide effective air detoxification and can even scrub out formaldehyde, benzene, and other cancer-causing volatile organic compounds NASA used them to help filter air for astronauts in the space station.

Later reports suggest that plants can reduce the burden of respiratory health issues and that soil microorganisms in potted plants also play a part in cleansing indoor air. It requires a mini jungle to produce a measurable difference in air quality, but NASA's research indicates that the larger and leaflets the plant, the better. Astronaut approved flora include philodendrons, pathos, ivy, and spider plants.

Sweeter ambiance: Research suggests that plants can make our homes environmentally friendly by raising the humidity to more comfortable levels, absorbing noise, and even reducing air particulates. The result? A nicer indoor environment.

Calmer living: Multiple studies have shown that houseplants calm us and make us feel more content, when we're around them, they reduce psychological and physiological stress by relaxing the body's autonomic nervous system and lowering diastolic blood pressure. Spending time around plants may even boost the immune system.

Enhanced productivity: Plants have been found to boost productivity, concentration, and mental processing, as well as to ease mental fatigue. So consider plants for your office, home office, or anywhere else you like to get work done.

Low barrier to entry: Caring for plants connects you to the outdoors and nature. ZZ plants, snake plants, and Christmas cacti are easy to maintain and good choices for beginners. 🌱



COWPEAS: FOR BETTER HEALTH

By Ann Heeley

Have you ever heard of cowpeas? Me either. It turns out that cowpeas are a group of legumes, the most common type in the U.S. being black-eyed peas. Several



different varieties are used in cooking throughout the world as they provide a balanced source of carbohydrates and proteins. Recently, however, scientists have discovered an even more important reason for growing cowpeas.

Like other beans, cowpeas are often attacked by aphids, bean beetles, leaf hoppers, and whiteflies. They may also suffer from various fungal, bacterial, and viral diseases. One disease in particular, cowpea mosaic virus, has been studied for several years, not to prevent black-eyed peas from succumbing to the virus, but as a potentially break-through therapy in fighting cancer.

While I was not able to find out how scientists made the leap from cowpea disease to cancer therapy, I did learn that studies in mice and dogs began about 7 years ago. Results of these studies were published in 2021 and 2022 showing how cowpea mosaic virus can successfully trigger the immune system to target cancer cells without attacking healthy cells. Furthermore, the virus gives the immune system a working “memory” to prevent cancer recurrence. Researchers at Dartmouth and University of California-San Diego will soon conduct human clinical trials (dependent on funding), hopefully with the same success in eliminating several different types of cancer. How amazing that black-eyed peas, such lowly legumes, could provide better health for millions! 🌱



TAWAWA PARK – POLLINATOR GARDEN

By Ann Heeley

While walking my dog in Tawawa Park, I noticed a large area of what looked like dormant (or dead) grass behind the playground area. Yes, it's dead, but this was done intentionally. Here's what I found:

The Tawawa pollinator habitat is a project in Tawawa Park designed to support bees, butterflies, and other pollinating insects. The over one-acre habitat is a collaboration between the City of Sidney Parks and Recreation Department and several community organizations, including the Sidney Kiwanis, Shelby Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), and the Sidney Rotary Club.

Key features of the project include:

- **Native plants:** The area will be planted with native, pollinator-friendly plants to provide a food source for insects throughout the year.
- **Educational focus:** The habitat will include interpretive signage and pathways to teach visitors about the importance of pollinators and the ecosystem they support.
- **Community involvement:** Partner organizations and community members will celebrate the project's introduction with an event.

The Tawawa pollinator habitat contributes to broader local efforts, such as the Ohio Pollinator Habitat Initiative, to combat the decline of pollinating insects. Similar pollinator gardens have also been established in Sidney at the OSU Extension Shelby County office and the Amos Memorial Public Library. 🌱

“Lunch and Learn” webinars begin

By Doug Benson

Do you still need a few more hours of continuing education credit? On the other hand, do you just want to learn more about nature and things in your yard and garden? The 2025-2026 “Lunch and Learn” webinar series has started. You can find a list of the free programs being streamed every other Tuesday at noon by going to the following website [Home | Master Gardener Volunteers](#) and clicking on the “Horticulture webinars” tab. You can also find links to recordings of previous programs. September 30; Extension educator, Dr. Tim McDermott, DVM, presented a program about ticks. On October 14, Dave Gardner, professor of turf grass science at OSU, will present a program about native alternatives to popular landscape plants. Unlike most other programs, Dr. Gardner's will be on from 2:00 to 3:00 that afternoon. 🌱

Forestry Field Day

By Teresa Freisthler

This Year's Forestry Field Day is on Sunday, October 26, at Tawawa Park from 1:00 pm-4:00 pm.

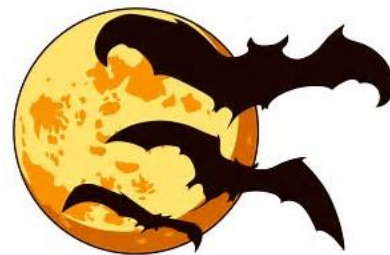
We don't have a major craft for the children to do, but we have numerous coloring pages, and a fall Tic Tac Toe game planned. The coloring pages are fall pictures. The Tic Tac Toe game also has a fall theme with a large fall sticker on the game. The kids will use buckeyes and tiny pumpkins to place on the board instead of Xs and Os. Doug will have our Master Gardener board on display. It will be a quiet resting spot for parents and their children from all the other activities there.

Come on out and see us if you get a chance! 🌱



November MG Newsletter

Since we have had several requests, we will do one more newsletter for 2025. Deadline will be November 5th and the publishing date will be November 12th. You can always email your article or other information at any time; you don't have to wait until the deadline date. Thanks for all the past submissions. 🌱



Happy Halloween

Consider Fall Planting or Double Cropping in 2026

By Jim McCracken

Fall planting is a great time to enjoy vegetables directly from the garden until frost and beyond. Many gardeners may have tried traditional alternatives such as carrots, beets, radishes, lettuce, and kale. If you have not tried these please do, I guarantee with a little effort and tender loving care you too will be successful.

Double cropping is also a type of fall planting. This is a technique that will allow a gardener to grow warm weather crops just a little later in the growing season. Here is a list of advantages to double cropping:

- Extends the growing season
- No fear of crops such as broccoli and cauliflower bolting
- Less bug or pest problems
- Moisture level usually increases when vegetables are setting blooms
- Space saving technique

I usually start broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage indoors on a heating mat in mid-June. If you start later one runs the risk of a killing frost before plants fully mature. After sprouting, seedling cups are placed directly under a grow light. Once the seedlings are 2-3 inches tall, they will be separated and placed in a flat. At this point both grow light and outdoor exposure are used based on weather conditions. Be careful to gradually build up time plants are outside, also avoid extremely windy conditions.

Warm weather crops such as butternut and spaghetti squash, zucchini, pumpkin, summer squash, cucumbers are all planted directly into the garden from seed around June 28th. The purpose of sowing then is to gain roughly two weeks of growth which helps to assure vegetables will mature before the first killing frost in the fall. Once onions are harvested by the middle of July, I hand dig and transplant all the vegetables listed as warm weather crops. Making sure to water transplants well and adding additional straw/mulch around each plant. Leave adequate space between transplants to allow for irrigation and harvesting.

Since I plant a case of onions every year, a large area of the garden at least 65' x 45' is available around the 2nd week of July. Large amounts of nitrogen were used to produce the largest bulbs possible. Therefore, little if any additional fertilizer is required. After the onions are harvested, all weeds are picked by hand. I then plant seedlings directly into leaf mulch that was used to suppress weeds in the onion production. Since the

leaves also retain moisture levels, I do not till the ground to plant the 2nd crop vegetables.

Production in the double crop area this year went surprisingly well except for the cucumbers which were a flop. The vegetables produced very well considering our very hot and dry growing conditions. Irrigation was provided as needed. I also avoid over-head watering. By using ground watering, powdery mildew was reduced. My zucchini production was as good as ever. I'm not really sure why the zucchini grew as if they were staked, growing upward not at ground level. Yes, I will stake all zucchini plants in the future, Butternut and spaghetti squash were numerous but smaller in size. Cabbage and broccoli harvest has begun, cauliflower development will take a little longer.

Remember to consider fall planting or double cropping in your vegetable garden. Don't fear having a failure or two, one can learn from failure as well as success. Happy Gardening in the future! 🌱



Above August 21: left is cauliflower, broccoli and cabbage with additional mulch added. Right is squash and zucchini plants.

Below October 7: left is cabbage plants heading; right, broccoli and cauliflower plants; and bottom is butternut squash to be taken to the Soup Kitchen.



WINNERS AND LOSERS

By Ann Heeley

The 2025 growing season has been a rough one. Non-stop rain followed by weeks of drought. High temps followed by a sudden cold spell followed by scorching temps. And when was the last time we experienced mid-80°s in October?

So some of my plantings were very successful, while others, not so much. Those in the “not so much” category included my blueberries, all 7 of which are in containers. Although all of the plants have been full of healthy, green leaves, three of the plants produced early with plenty of large, juicy berries; two produced fewer berries than in years past; and two didn’t even flower. Last year, all of the plants produced delicious berries for months. After reading various articles as to what may have caused these erratic productions, I’ve decided that it’s time to change the soil in each of the containers. I’m using a mixture of pine bark, peat moss, and perlite for these acid-lovers. I plan to repot all of them in the near future so the roots have time to get established before it gets really cold, and then pray that they make it through the winter.

My caladiums were also in the loser category. They’ve long been among my favorites for their gorgeous, shade-loving leaves in a variety of colors, sizes, and shapes. This year, however, the north side of the house didn’t give enough protection from the late afternoon sun and the intense heat. I’ll save the tubers over the winter, and try again next year in a different location.

In the winners category, I’d have to list all of my heirloom tomatoes as show stoppers. Two varieties in particular, ‘Kellogg’s Breakfast’ and ‘San Marzano’ would still be producing if I had continued to water and feed them. (We had tomatoes every day, fixed in a variety of ways, until we were



tomatoed out. I also ran out of freezer space and people who wanted extra tomatoes.) ‘Kellogg’s Breakfast’ is a large, orange, low-acid variety that’s great for slicing or in sandwiches. ‘San Marzano’ is a large (5-6” long), Roma-type, meaty tomato with very few seeds that can be used in sauces and salsa. I’ve saved



seeds for all the tomatoes I grew, and I hope to have a repeat performance next year.

Another winner was Fan Flower (*Scaevola aemula*). I visited Crossways’s greenhouse looking for annual, sun-



loving flowers that would stay low and survive in a hot, dry area without too much pampering. Fan Flower fit the bill. It provided ground cover in dry areas and around some shrubs to keep the soil moist underneath. It also spread nicely without becoming invasive while it

screened out weeds. Best of all, I never watered or fertilized it, and it bloomed profusely, attracting pollinators, from the day I planted it until...whenever I decide to tear it out.

My third winner was Trailing Red ‘Mezoo’ (*Aptenia cordifolia*). Earlier this year, Linda Jennings gave me a well-rooted

Mezoo, and I babied it until it got warm enough to put in a large, pedestaled planter. It’s now 2.5 feet wide and drapes another 2 feet over the sides of the planter. I read where it roots easily, so last week I took some cuttings to see if the experts are telling the truth. When the next newsletter comes out, I’ll issue my findings.



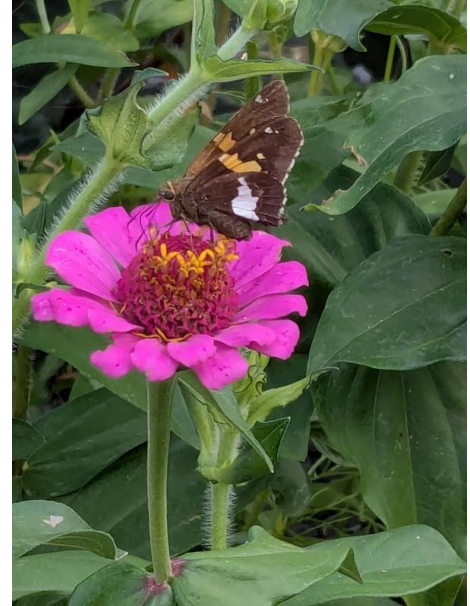
(continued to next page)

Last on my list of winners are the zinnias. I found some old seeds, 2019 I think, scuffed up some dirt and threw the seeds on top. I may have sprinkled some soil on top of the seeds, and I may have watered them in, but I don't remember. What I do know, is that they're now 4 feet tall with pink blooms and loads of swallowtails, monarchs, and silver-spotted skipper butterflies.



old seeds, 2019 I think, scuffed up some dirt and threw the seeds on top. I may have sprinkled some soil on top of the seeds, and I may have watered them in, but I don't remember. What I do know, is that they're now 4 feet tall with pink blooms and loads of swallowtails, monarchs,

In other news, I started some plants for the Memorial Garden at the Extension Office. I have a weigela, two hardy hibiscus plants, and a beautiful, pink honeysuckle (not the evil kind). I haven't yet planted them because of the extended drought, but with weather forecasts indicating cooler temps and more rain, they should be ready to go in the ground later this week. Nancy Russell also provided a heads-up on *Caryopteris* 'Beyond Midnight' (*Caryopteris x clandonensis*), a small, *Proven Winner* shrub that would be perfect for the bare areas in front of the Baptisia to the right of the double doors. This sun-loving, drought-tolerant shrub shows purplish-blue flowers from late summer through fall, and doesn't require dead-heading. Pollinators love it, too. Recommendations indicate that spring is the best time to plant these shrubs since they need warmer weather for their roots to become established. Sounds like a winner to me!



Happy Gardening—only a few more weeks before you can pack away those tools and find another hobby that won't push you closer to back surgery. 🌱



Outstanding Master Gardener Volunteer for Shelby County

We celebrate **Janet Nelson** for being a state finalist and for being our very own Outstanding Shelby County Master Gardener Volunteer of the Year. We honor her service of nine years, and we are privileged to have her continue to choose to be part of our group. 🎉



The Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA. Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration; Associate Dean, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences; Director, Ohio State University Extension and Gist Chair in Extension Education and Leadership. TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only)
Newsletter Editor: Carol Strayer, email: carolstrayer@yahoo.com