
Green Thumb
The Newsletter for the Polk County Master Gardeners
December 2011

**ISU Polk County Extension
1625 Adventureland Drive, Altoona, Iowa
Phone 515-957-5760**

Mike's Musings

We passed a major family milestone this month with our first purchase of an artificial Christmas tree. (Actually, it is the second if you consider the one-footer stuffed in my wife's suitcase for her 1968 trip to Bangkok to meet me on a Christmas "R & R" during my Army Vietnam tour.) Other than that, we faithfully erected a fresh-cut tree each year. Many interesting discussions of tree attributes were held over the years... Now, retirement has led to us to more out of town trips over Christmas holidays, making our cut tree a sorry (and dry) mess upon return.

The Christmas tree, once the exclusive province of those practicing the Christian faith, has been secularized over the years and is widely used around the globe. Noteworthy is the lighting of the "National Christmas Tree," a 90 year tradition in Washington, D.C. The decorated holiday tree is even celebrated in Russia, where it is known as the new-year fir-tree.

History traces the first "yule trees" back to the 16th century in what is now Germany and Estonia. Less known is that yule-time (or yuletide) was a Nordic pagan festival of which parts were absorbed into the Christian Christmas traditions. The Christmas trees of the ancients would be freshly cut, hauled into the home shortly before the holiday, and decorated with burning candles, tinsel, and other ornaments.

The Christmas tree tradition took many years to be established in America, with early support coming from their use by English royalty, Canadians and early Colonial residents. It took until the 1850s for them to be widely used in the United States.

Live trees remain very popular, with over 35 million being sold nationwide. However, roughly half of the Christmas trees sales are now for the artificial versions. In Iowa, there are over 100 members in the Iowa Christmas Tree Growers Association offering trees cut from over 1500 dedicated acres. The ISU Forestry Extension estimates that 60 percent of these trees end-up being recycled into mulch.

Regardless of your tree preference, or your faith tradition, have a happy holiday season!

Mike Treinen, Steering Committee Chairman 240-4169 treinen1941@q.com

P.S. Mary thanks everyone for their diligence in reporting over 14,800 hours Master Gardener volunteer hours so far for 2011. Mary estimates that the total will top 16,000 hours for the year. Your volunteer work has a major impact on our community. Keep up the good work!

Discovery Garden at the Iowa State Fairgrounds

December has arrived bringing its grayness and cool temps. One way to brighten the nights is to enjoy all of the lights in the neighborhood and to leaf through all of the seed catalogs that are arriving. I personally enjoy the down time, from gardening, that winter brings, allowing me to get ready for the busyness of spring.

During this busy month, may all of you find quiet moments to reflect on the beauty and holiness of the season and to enjoy the company of family and friends.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS from the Discovery Garden

Jean Roe, Dean Brand, Cheree Tilton, & Patrick Schmitt, Co-Chairs

Demonstration Garden in Urbandale

My 82-year-old mother provides me chuckles and grins and that was the case last week when she was trying to recall my planned activity for Saturday, November 19 when we "put the roses to bed" (a big thank you to those who helped put rose collars on, helped move brick in the food pantry garden for rototilling, cleaned off the last of the vegetables and composted!). When she remembered it as "putting the roses to sleep" it made me realize how doing something for many years becomes second nature...including the 'garden-speak' and using language that is second nature to me but sometimes foreign to others.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have the Demonstration Garden and gardening in general to become second nature, and to be around such a devoted, diverse group of gardeners. Whether having a lot of passion for the hobby or whether in the early learning stages, all Master Gardeners are welcome to and do explore and further enhance their gardening education. The Demo Garden has evolved over the past 25, and especially more recent 10 years, but what is consistent throughout is the passion shown by all. I thank all of the gardeners who have helped over the past year, and appreciate the leadership shown by Dean Brand and the Steering Committee. Thanks also to Mary Farlow, Jeanine Baldwin and Virginia Hunnell, for making this group great and being the behind the scenes 'glue'.

I will be setting up a meeting for working through labels, plant identification and database. If you haven't already notified me that you are interested, please let me know.

Happy Holidays to all!

Margaret Spikes, Project Chair 213-5353, 984-9064, margaretspikes@wellsfargo.com

Garden Tour Committee

If you are interested in this committee or have questions, please contact **Michelle Walke** mwalkedesign@mac.com today! Thank you!

Directory Updates

Pat Reeves is now using email Patriciareeves2@gmail.com

Val Singer also has a new email address. vsinger111@gmail.com

Gloria Smith has changed from Gloriaksmith@gmail.com to smithgloria35@gmail.com

Gardeners Show House News

The Show House is filled with lights and doves of peace for the holidays: it is just breathtaking, especially in the late afternoon. Come visit, and bring your families!



The Show House is going global in 2012, and there are many opportunities for volunteers.

We have 2 or 3 display bays open in April for World Landmarks - and are looking for people / teams to create displays. Ideas include: the Washington Monument, Statue of Liberty, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Big Ben, Versaille, Monet's Garden, and the Great Wall of China. Is anyone interested in taking one of these ideas on? If you've never done a display in the Show House before, we have experienced volunteers who can help you.

In October 2012, The Show House Goes to Italy. Not really - but we decided to go BIG, and turn the entire Show House into an Italian gardenscape. We are looking for arches, stones, really large pots, pedestals, window planters, shutters, etc. We are also looking for lots of volunteers to help brainstorm design ideas and create displays. Let Mary know if you can help out in any way (it's going to be great fun!).

Our next planning meeting is January 16th, at 6:30, in the Riverwalk Cafe at the Botanical Center. Please join us!

Merry Christmas, and best wishes for 2012!

Any questions or interest please contact Mary Howell-Williams - 556-3684, mhwphoto@mchsi.com or Ann Goecke Goecke.Ann@principal.com

Mary Howell-Williams, Project Chair

Bus Trips

Please mark your calendars for June 2, 2012. We will be heading to the Omaha area for a one day trip which will include visits to private and public gardens, as well as some shopping at local nurseries. More details will be available in a few months when we begin taking registrations for the trip.

In addition, please be watching for a survey from the bus tour committee (via e-mail). We are considering a multi-day trip Minneapolis to participate in the **Midwest Master Gardener convention in July**. We need your input so we can determine whether there is enough interest to move ahead with this trip. Any input you can provide will be appreciated!

Laurie Barrick, committee chair

Enabling Garden in Altoona

On behalf of our co chairs, Christine Barker, Paul Wilkens, Sandie Hamilton and myself, we would love to thank everyone for volunteering to help us this year at the Enabling Garden! Santa will be very good to you for giving of yourself, sharing your time and passion unconditionally! Bless all of you!

We also would like to thank Tina Gosselink, Ruth O'Connor, Bill & Judy Goshorn, John & Sarah Champion, Dianna Marquardt, Sharon Schoonover, Randy Campbell, Andrea Boughton, for donating and helping with the appreciation baskets for the city of Altoona! The city has helped this year by allowing us water, electricity; mulching and just about anything we needed for the Enabling Garden.

We are a community that is enthusiastic about the Enabling Garden and look forward to an awesome year in 2012. We have new plans already in progress.

Keep on reading your Green Thumb for Enabling Garden planning meetings starting in February of 2012.

May this holiday season bring you and your families much love and happiness!

Paula Winslow, 967-3409, peaceinthegardern@aol.com

Master Gardener Class

2012 MASTER GARDENER TRAINING - We are in the processing of sending out information letter and application to those individuals who have indicated an interest in taking the class. Please encourage family members, friends, co-workers, etc. to email Mary Farlow at mfarlow@iastate.edu if they would like to be included in this class. Class starts January 10 and goes to April 3, every Tuesday evening, from 6:15 pm to 9:30 pm.

Botanical Center event

Next year, June 10, 2012, the Center is planning a group bike ride with 3 different length routes, which all start and end at the Center parking lot. If you are interested in participating or would like to offer to "man" a booth, please contact me or Melinda Ellwanger at mellwanger@yahoo.com

Recurring MG Calendar!

Monday evening work nights at Demonstration Garden, Urbandale suspended until spring

Tuesday & Saturday mornings Botanical Center Gardeners Show House work sessions

Tuesday evening work nights at Enabling Garden, Altoona suspended until spring

Wednesday and Saturday mornings at PCMG greenhouse, done until February 2012

Wednesday evening work nights at Discovery Garden at the Iowa State Fairgrounds suspended until spring

Friday morning work session at BC River Walk suspended until spring



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