



February 2004. *Love is the fairest flower that blooms in life's garden.* Anonymous

Coordinator's Comments

By *Bonnie Birker*

What a success for Master Gardeners! *The Winter Gardening Fair* was a smashing hit with volunteers organizing, teaching, assisting, doing exhibits, etc. on January 24. Thanks to all of you for your fantastic efforts. And, special thanks to Zora Ronan who planned and orchestrated this great event.

Another reason to celebrate success: the 2003 Annual Report is completed (see summary article on page 2) and shows how active you have been. Congratulations!

I have some observations and tips for reporting your hours in 2004:

- ◆ Report your hours quarterly. You can leave them in the MG office (file on wall), send them to the office, or e-mail them.
- ◆ Report your hours in no less than 15-minute increments.
- ◆ Use keywords to report activities, e.g., Winter Gardening Fair classroom assistant, Hotline, teaching school children, etc.
- ◆ For continuing education hours, report any "horticulture learning" at Extension sponsored or MG taught events. Other classes, conferences, etc. need pre-approval to determine if they qualify.
- ◆ Volunteer service should focus on regular MG projects and committee work. If you want to do something new/special/exotic – please check it out with the Steering Committee first.

I hope you found your 2003 service record printout helpful. Unfortunately, we are losing Samantha on Feb. 6 to another job. She provided great input for a better reporting system – plus other types of support to the MG program. Thanks and

good luck, Samantha!

Landscape and Garden Expo

By *Monica Boeckenstedt*

The 2004 Landscape and Garden Expo is quickly approaching. So, mark your calendars for March 5-7. *A Garden for All Seasons* is the theme of the MG booth that will focus on a container garden for each season, accompanied by publications that relate to the container plants. Plant doctors also will be available in the booth for questions.

A series of eight classes will be presented on Saturday and Sunday: 1) Proper Planting and Pruning of Trees. 2) Container Gardening. 3) Pond Construction. 4) Ornamental Grasses for the Home Landscape. 5) From Trash to Treasure. 6) Growing Gourds for Fun. 7) Bio Dynamics for Home Gardeners. And, 8) Natural Landscaping for the Homeowner.

We are looking for volunteers to work as plant doctors, booth attendants, classroom greeters, speaker introducers and class announcers. To volunteer, please complete the volunteer sign-up sheet included in this Germinator or contact: Amber Aiken – 396-8715, Monica Boeckenstedt – 832-2460, or Pat Ervin – 377-1293.

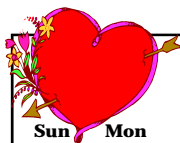
On Thursday, February 12 we will hold an informational meeting for anyone interested in volunteering for the event. The meeting will be at the Extension office at 6:00 pm.

We are looking for 3 more card tables to display the container gardens during Expo. If you have one that we could use, please contact

GERMINATOR

Prepared by and for Master Gardeners in Linn County, Iowa

Vol. 16, No. 2. Editor: Roger Strohbehn



February

MASTER GARDENER EVENTS

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29						

- Feb. 3, 5:30. Youth Gardens Committee. Extension Office.
- Feb. 3, 6:30. Steering Committee Meeting. Extension Office.
- Feb. 9, 1:30 – Compost Work Group. Extension Office.
- Feb. 12, 6:30 – Garden and Landscape Expo Committee. Extension Office.
- Feb. 28, 1:30 – EXPERT ED – Pruning Ornamental and Shade Trees Demo. By Gene Frye at Noelridge Park (meet at parking lot by pond).

Linn County Extension: Helping Iowans Become Their Best

By *Linda Bigley*

Linn County Extension offers more to county residents than the well known 4-H and Master Gardener programs. Over the next few months I will briefly describe our other programs so that you and your friends may know about the full range of Iowa State University Extension resources that are available to you here in Linn County. We want you to “become your best.”

FAMILY LIFE – Fathers are parents too. It seems obvious, but if you look at most books on parenting they are written for mothers. Research shows that dads like to get information differently and they often interact with children in different ways than mothers. Kristi Cooper, Family Life Specialist, has provided the leadership for a project we call “Me & My Dad.” This project is dedicated to strengthening the relationships between dads and kids. For more information check the website www.extension.iastate.edu/dads.



Master Composter Program Re-activates

A work group including Kathy Carew, Dan Rockwell, Deb Walser, Jay Kacena and Bill Snyder has been planning a re-startup of the Master Composter program. Look for Master Composter training in March – which may include Johnson County MGs — and some workshops in May.



2003 Report for ISU Extension Master Gardeners in Linn County

Volunteer service hours: 7,977

Continuing education hours: 1,486

Number of contacts by MGs: 13,782

Adults – 12,279

Youth – 1,503

Hortline contacts: 7,923 with 10,119 questions

MG hours for media: Radio – 61; TV – 8.8

Active Master Gardeners: 125

Includes: Interns: 15

Lifetime: 25

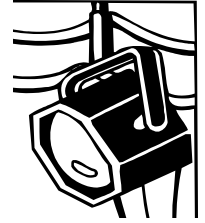
(For a more detailed version of the report, contact Bonnie Birker)



MG Logo Garments

Last Call!! All Master Garment orders and payments need to be into the Extension office by Friday Feb 6. If you have questions please contact Angie Young at youngangie@mcleodusa.net or 363-6275.

Volunteer Spotlight on — CATHY COOK



When pressed to say exactly what led her to the MG program, Cathy Cook says she can't quite remember. It had been on her mind for a long time, but a trip to Culver's Nursery and a serendipitous conversation with Sherri Baldonado was the impetus for filling out the paperwork and going for the Intern interview.

Now with her volunteer requirements met and a graduate of the 2002 MG class, Cathy turns her sights to continuing education and administrative support. She has volunteered to assist with organizing the *Landscape & Garden Expos* and observed *From the Ground Up*. This year the *Hortline* is her pursuit. She is in the process of completing a 27-hour course on home horticulture taught in Scott County by ISU faculty. Ever since high school, Cathy has enjoyed botany and this class allows her to delve deeper into plant physiology and pathology.



Cathy is a medical sonographer at St. Luke's Hospital and her job is a pleasure both professionally and for the great schedule flexibility it affords. This flexibility allows her a cherished activity – travel.

Last summer she traveled to Mozambique for Children's Relief International. There she helped introduce moringo trees to the area. These trees have highly nutritious leaves, flowers and pods. The leaves are many times higher in nutrient concentrations than regular foods, and are used fresh as salad greens or dried and put in cooking. The trees will supplement nutritional needs of children at a newly built school. A local gardener is on hand to teach the kids how to harvest leaves and other plant parts. She would go back again. Cathy is planning a summer trip to England sightseeing and garden touring.

In the last three years her own gardens have evolved from a couple of back yard bushes and a sand box to a large variety of flowering bushes and vines as her foundational plantings with perennials as accents. She uses her color wheel in planning and loves to mix purple with orange and yellow. Cathy named many favorite bushes, but she especially loves her serviceberry bush and a porcelain berry vine. Spring is her garden's peak season and her credo is – “I'm not afraid to move plants and I'm not afraid to prune.”

Cathy is excited about the upcoming year – travel plans (both local and abroad), educational opportunities and service through the Hortline. It will be an enriching year.

Interview by Roxie Goetz.

Winter Gardening Fair

By Zora Ronan

The second *Winter Gardening Fair* is now history. Everyone needs to give themselves a great big pat on the back and say "What a good job we did!" A final count showed that 639 people registered for the classes – an increase of more than 40 percent over our 2003 Winter Gardening Fair. A capacity crowd (440) filled Ballantyne Auditorium for David Cavagnaro's spectacular slide show. The over-flow crowd was seated in two other theaters.

Thank you, thank you to all the MG volunteers who worked all week packing handouts. On Saturday everyone worked so hard and so efficiently. Events are successful only because of you, the volunteers who see what needs to be done and then do it.

I want to give special thanks to those volunteers who spent untold numbers of hours putting together those wonderful new slide shows. We not only had the biggest and best horticultural education fest ever, but also now have many new programs to add to our library. Our MG teachers teach and share.

Many of you asked for the class handouts. Not much was left because of sell-out crowds. I am trying to find a way to put that on-line for you. If you could drop me an e-mail and tell me what classes you want, I will get that information to you.

Thanks again for making *The Winter Gardening Fair* a fabulous success.

MGs Win Gardening Competitions

Wava Schmidt recently took third place in the "America's Most Beautiful Herb Garden" contest on the PBS show "The Victory Garden." Wava's garden was the Williamsburg design based on the recipe book "It's About Thyme." Her herb garden was also featured in the Eastern Iowa "Home" section of the Gazette. Congratulations Wava!!

Karmin Mullins will be featured in the March/April 2004 issue of "Fine Gardening Magazine." Karmin entered the magazine's 2003 Container Design Challenge in August of 2003 and was informed that she was the "winner" out of 250 world-wide entries. Karmin's unique container was a metal turbine vent from the top of a chicken coop. She used sphagnum moss and a variety of annual plants to develop her container. Karmin would like to thank Zora Ronan for suggesting that she enter her unusual container after reading about the contest in the magazine. Congratulations Karmin!!

Profile Reminder

Timely completion of the Linn County MG Directory depends on the prompt return of the profile update questionnaire sent to all MGs in early January. If you have not yet completed your questionnaire and returned it to the Extension Office, please do so ASAP. Thank you.



Brenda Garbe helping visitors at the Winter Gardening Fair registration table.



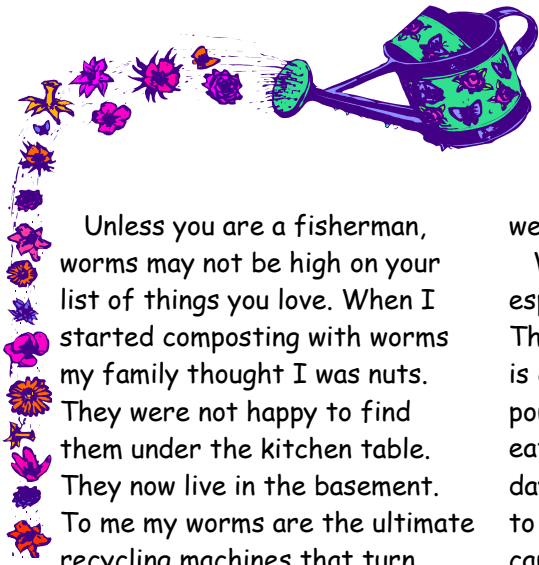
Laura Appleget "in action" discussing "Perennial Basics" at the Winter Gardening Fair.

Chicago Flower Show Trip

You won't want to miss the fabulous Chicago Flower & Garden Show on Monday, March 15. Linn County MGs have chartered a bus for the trip at the low fare of only \$40 per person (includes admission fee). Approximately 25 seats are still available. The bus will depart from the Extension parking lot promptly at 5:30 am and leave Chicago at 6:00 pm. Reservations and payment should be received at the Extension Office by March 1.

Seminar opportunities at the Show include: 1) Great Home Gardener's Series: Trudi Temple. 2) New Annuals for 2004. 3) Hydrangeas for the Home Landscape. 4) Climbers and Twiners: Vines for the Home Garden. 5) Keeping Flowering Houseplants in Bloom. 6) Traveling Gardener Series: Allerton Gardens, Monticello, Illinois. For information about the Show go to the website www.chicagoflower.com/.

NOTE: MGs who have attended past Shows recommend wearing casual clothes and comfortable walking shoes.



Things We Love

Vermicomposting

By Deb Walser

Unless you are a fisherman, worms may not be high on your list of things you love. When I started composting with worms my family thought I was nuts. They were not happy to find them under the kitchen table. They now live in the basement. To me my worms are the ultimate recycling machines that turn kitchen scraps into 'black gold' for my plants. This is called vermicomposting. (Vermi means worms in Latin.)

To compost kitchen waste you can't use just any old worms. You need red worms that are available at most bait shops as red wigglers or from garden-supply catalogs. These guys are hungry and can consume half their weight in organic material each day.

My red worms live in a Rubbermaid bin with moist, shredded newspapers as their home. I started with one pound of worms in a 12"x18"x12" bin and have added three more bins. About one square foot of surface space is needed for every pound of food scraps to be composted per

week.

Worms love all the food we do, especially the 'gone bad' parts. They will eat faster if the waste is cut or mashed. Given time, one pound of worms will eventually eat one-half pound of scraps per day. Worms, like children, tend to shun onions, broccoli, cauliflower and orange peels. They love coffee and all melons



especially watermelon. To feed simply push the top layer of bedding to one side, layer the scraps in and recover with the bedding. Food should be covered to avoid fruit flies and fungus gnats. These are not dangerous to the worms but annoying to us.

I keep my vermicomposting bins at a worm friendly 65 to 70 degrees. Worms can go three or four weeks without being fed.

For longer periods you might want to find a worm sitter.

Recovering the 'black gold' is the most important part of vermicomposting. When the container starts getting full and the contents look like soil, its time to harvest. The easiest way is to spread out a piece of black plastic. Make several piles of compost on the plastic - worms and all. Shine a bright light on the pile. The worms, not liking light, will dig toward the center of the pile. Scrape off the top. The worms will continue to dig to get away from the light. Repeat this process several times to recover the castings.

Since I started vermicomposting I have been asked by schools to share my experience. This February I will be visiting Alburnett Elementary School for the fourth time. I have twice visited Kennedy High School with my worms during the 9th grade soil chapter. My children's friends now call me the 'worm lady.'

Happy vermicomposting and don't let your fishing friends run off with your recycling buddies.



EXPERT ED

Have you ever wondered if you were pruning your trees and shrubs in the proper manner? If so, you can learn the right techniques by going to the *Pruning Ornamental and Shade Trees Demonstration* at Noelridge Park on Saturday, February 28, 1:30 pm. (Meet in parking lot by pond.) Our own forester, Gene Frye, will discuss and demonstrate the dos and don'ts of pruning. Bring along a friend, neighbor or family member!

Treasures for Teaching Kids about Gardens

If you have opportunities to work in kids' garden projects, there are four kits of books from our November training that you can use to supplement your lessons. They include: *Singing In Our Garden*, *Conservation Choices*, *The Surprise Garden*, *Pumpkin Pumpkin*, *Stone Soup*, *A Weed is a Flower*, *Compost! Growing Gardens from your Garbage*, *The Reason for a Flower*, *How a Seed Grows*, etc. Take a look at them and check out a kit!

Steering Committee Minutes 1/6/04

Members present: A. Aiken, J. Balsanek, K. Carew, P. Ervin, L. Hartman, D. Hennessey, D. Johnson, J. Kacena, W. Schmidt, D. Walser and A. Young.

Others present: Linda Bigley.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Community Ed – Ronan was not present to give a status report on the Winter Gardening Fair. The Committee recommended that Ronan secure a garden book(s) as a door prize(s) at the end of the keynote speaker's presentation.

Event Signs – Ervin reported that Sign Pro expects to produce the MG signs as ordered within three weeks.

Landscape & Garden Expo – Expo committee co-chairs are Aiken, Ervin and Monica Boeckenstedt. Aiken reported that this year's theme will be "A Garden for all Seasons." Ervin is securing speakers for the event. The committee has requested four MGs to prepare flower containers presenting the four seasons for the MG booth as follows: Lori Priest – fall, Wava Schmidt – winter, Ellen Skripsky – spring, and Karmin Mullins – summer.

Compost Program – Carew reported that the Compost Work Group would like to reactivate the Master Composter program. Funding may be available for Johnson and Linn County in the near future. Composter training is expected to start in March.

NEW BUSINESS:

Committee Meeting Schedule – The Committee agreed to meet at 6:30 pm on the first Tuesday of each month.

Logo Garments – Young passed out a garment order form for MG clothing. The clothing will have the Iowa State University Extension name on it.

Lifetime Award Waiver – The Committee agreed to grant a waiver to Ray Novey to obtain Lifetime Master Gardener status. He is short of that goal by six education hours. Ray is currently caring for his wife, who is house bound.

OLD BUSINESS:

Election of Officers — Cole stated that the Policies and Procedures Manual does not specifically address the timing of officer elections for the Steering Committee. The Committee approved a motion that new committee members be allowed to vote in the election of Steering Committee officers.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Chicago Flower Show Trip – Cole asked if there was a printed schedule for the Chicago Flower Show and if so, which seminars qualify for education hours. Deb Walser will do some research and report back to the committee.

Service Reports – Walser reported that 15 people were delinquent in reporting their 2003 volunteer hours. Two individuals resigned for personal reasons. She thanked everyone who helped with phone calls.

Next meeting: February 3, 6:30 pm at the Extension office.

Respectfully submitted: Amber Aiken, Secretary.

Memorial for Books

By *Darrell Hennessey*

Several MGs plan to contribute to our MG reference library in memory of MG Chuck Martin. Linda ordered two books in Chuck's memory: "Natural Gardening in Small Spaces" by Noel Kingsbury and "The Well-Designed Mixed Garden" by Tracy De Sabato-Aust.

If you would like to contribute to purchase these books or to an ongoing fund for books in Chuck's memory, please feel free to do so. Checks can be made out to Linn County Extension-MG Memorial. Book titles and authors will be recorded as memorial gifts and placed on our bookshelves for future reference work.



Shade Tree Short Course

The 48th annual ISU Extension *Shade Tree Short Course* will be held March 9-10 on the ISU campus. This highly regarded regional event will be of special interest to MGs this year. Theme of the short course is **Reading the Landscape...What, Where, When, Why and How?**

Charles Martin

Charles "Chuck" L. Martin, 82, died on January 2, 2004 following an extended illness. Chuck was a member of the founding class of Linn County Master Gardeners in 1982 and a stalwart volunteer for many years. In 1991, Chuck was honored as both the Linn County and Iowa Master Gardener of the Year in recognition of his loyalty and dedicated service. He was an avid rosarian who gladly shared his love and knowledge of roses with others who sought his advice. Chuck will be long remembered for his contributions to the Linn County Master Gardener program.



A wide variety of courses can be selected from a series of concurrent workshops. For more information about classes, speakers and registration, see the Short Course brochure in the MG office or go to the website: www.uces.iastate.edu/304/shade.htm.



Darrell Hennessey prepared the following Q & A's that are frequently asked of the Hortline volunteers in February.

Q: I've heard about raised bed gardening, what are the pros and cons of this type of gardening?

A: Raised beds are ideal for gardeners living in areas plagued with poor soil. Filled with a combination of soil, compost, aged manure and peat moss, these beds provide a gardener the opportunity to establish his or her own ideal growing environment. Additionally, they provide great drainage for those areas where drainage is a problem. Even though the advantages of raised beds far outweigh any disadvantages, one needs to keep in mind that they may need extra water due to the free-draining soil. The soil warms more quickly in the spring and permits earlier planting, but also freezes earlier and to a greater depth in the early winter.

Raised beds also provide easy access for those gardeners who might otherwise have problems working at ground level. Especially for those constrained to wheel chairs or who have physical restrictions. Raised beds are much more accessible than conventional beds.

There has been some concern recently about toxicity of treated material used in raised bed construction. Iowa State University Extension notes that, while there may be some minor leaching of arsenic from some materials, the levels encountered and the attendant risk is considered to be minimal. Some things to keep in mind, however, are to avoid materials with a powdery white surface residue, wear a dust mask and goggles when working with the wood, dispose of sawdust and scraps in a trash bag, and seal the finished bed with an oil-based product before installation. Cedar is also a long-lasting material that resists rotting.

Reference: HHPN May 10, 2002.

Q: My apple tree did not bear fruit very well last year. I've been told it should be pruned. When and how do I do that?

A: The best time to prune fruit trees is late February to early April. Fruit trees pruned in fall or early winter may be susceptible to winter injury.

There are a couple of excellent reasons for trimming fruit trees. Removal of sprouts and excess branches provides more vigor for the tree to produce fruit. Apple trees probably produce best when trained to a central leader or a modified central leader structure. It's often best to trim apple trees following a year of poor yield rather than following a good year.

One of the best things you can do for fruit trees is to thin the excess fruit. Thinning increases both the size and quality of fruit, prevents limbs from breaking under the weight of a heavy load and avoids alternate year bearing in which a small crop follows an especially heavy crop.

Remove all limbs that are dead, diseased, or dying. A badly neglected tree will have many dead limbs to be removed. Removing them will go a long way toward opening up the tree to permit light penetration and will improve air circulation. Branch stubs should not be left on apple trees. As with any tree, make the cut just outside the branch bark collar and let the wound heal naturally. Flush cuts are not recommended because they leave larger wounds that are slow to heal. A conventional pruning shears can be used to remove the smaller branches. When doing this, orient the shears so that the blade faces toward the outer part of the branch and the hook faces toward its origin.

Reference: PM 780 Pruning / Training Fruit Trees.

Q: I've been told that some of my indoor plants are infested with mealybugs. How can I verify this and how do I control them?

A: Mealybugs are part of a group of sucking insects that are often covered with a light protective coating of wax. They can be found on a range of different hosts and on all parts of a plant. Sticky, cottony substances, especially between leaf axils, is a sign of mealybug infestation. Examine the upper and under sides of the foliage, especially along the stems. Severe infestations will resemble patches of cotton anywhere on the plant. Also, look for a sticky substance called honey dew which is excreted by the bugs.

Washing plants regularly will keep infestations down. Mealybugs often nest deep in the crotches of a plant which makes chemical control especially difficult. Mealybugs can often be controlled by lightly rubbing the insect with a cotton swab dipped in alcohol. Insecticidal soap is also a suitable treatment if applied before the young mealybugs develop their protective white coats. Isolating infested plants while eradicating the mealybugs will help avoid infecting other plants.

Reference: HHPN April 6, 1994.

The GERMINATOR is issued on or about the first of each month. News items should be sent by the 25th of the previous month to Roger Strobehn [e-mail: rstrobehn@aol.com] or to the Extension Office.

Landscape and Garden Expo volunteer opportunities
A Garden for all Seasons

Thursday March 4

Booth Set Up	Shift 1 5:30-7:30

Friday March 5

Booth Area	Shift 1 4:00-6:00	Shift 2 6:00-8:00
Plant Doctor		
Booth/Pubs		

Saturday March 6

Booth Area	Shift 1 9:00-11:00	Shift 2 11:00-1:00	Shift 3 1:00-3:00	Shift 4 3:00-5:00	Shift 5 5:00-8:00
Plant Doctor					
Booth/Pubs					
Seminar Area	Shift 1 10:00-12:00		Shift 2 1:00-4:00		
Greeter					
Sound and A/V					
Introductions					
PA Announcer					

Sunday March 7

Booth Area	Shift 1 9:00-11:00	Shift 2 11:00-1:00	Shift 3 1:00-4:00
Plant Doctor			
Booth/Pubs			
Seminar Area	Shift 1 10:00-12:00	Shift 2 1:00-4:00	
Greeter			
Sound and A/V			
Introductions			
PA Announcer			
Booth Clean up	Shift 1 4:00-6:00		

Please return this form to the Linn County Extension Office by February 10.

3279 7th Ave Marion, Iowa 52302-3731

Or fax them to the Extension at: 319-377-0475

Please contact Amber Aiken at 396-8715 or Monica Boeckenstedt at 832-2460 with any questions.

