APRIL MEETING PLANS
The Wapello County Master Gardeners will meet on Monday, April 4th at 6:30 pm in room 110 of the IHCC Rural Health Education Building. The program for the meeting has not been finalized at this time. The major item on the agenda for the meeting is election of officers for the upcoming year.

MARCH MEETING MINUTES
Wapello County Master Gardeners met on Monday, March 7. Eleven people were present to hear Joe Jacobs, Tenco Industries Greenhouse Specialist, talk about Tenco’s greenhouse projects. The greenhouse in Fairfield is currently the only one actually in production. The Ottumwa facility is still in progress, the greenhouse itself is erected and the storage and supply areas will soon be constructed. Tenco uses the “Dutch Bucket” method of hydroponics to grow tomatoes. Advantages to this method are:

- Higher planting densities
- Year-round production
- Better control of plant’s environment

Although there is no soil used in hydroponics, a soil-less rooting substrate is used to help hold moisture around the roots. Bumble bees are purchased to use for pollination in the greenhouses, although the first pollination is done using mechanical vibration. In addition to tomatoes, Tenco plans on growing lettuce and herbs in the greenhouse, using a “nutrient film technique”. The plan is to have 88 Tenco clients/year working in the greenhouse, on a rotating schedule of 10-11 clients at a time.

Richard Klodt called the meeting to order, in the absence of the club president and vice president.

Minutes of the previous meeting (December): There were no additions or corrections to the minutes. Jean Dell moved, Mary Kivlahan seconded that the minutes of the December meeting be approved as printed. Motion passed.

Treasurer’s Report: (from Jess at the Extension office) The beginning balance (transfer from South Ottumwa to Extension fund) was $783.40. $93.75 was paid to the Chamber for half of the Extension booth rent at the H & G Show, with an ending balance of $689.65, as of 3/7/16. Carol moved that the club donate $25 to Tenco (to go toward the Ottumwa greenhouse project) in appreciation for the presentation made by Joe Jacobs. Juliene Kent seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Old Business: Richard reported that attendance at this year’s Home and Garden Show was down. Suggestions are needed for improvement. Discussion followed. Some mentioned that the Chamber needed to do a better job of advertising the show.

New Business: Nominating Committee to recruit officers for our April election: Carol Geib and Mary Kivlahan volunteered to serve as the nominating committee. Carol said she would do the Secretary/Newsletter position one more year. Mary Kivlahan volunteered to be treasurer. Carol suggested that instead of having a designated President and Vice President, we have a rotating meeting “leader”. 
Adjournment: Sue Richardson moved the meeting be adjourned, Jean Dell seconded, motion passed.

Secretary, Carol Geib

TREASURER’S REPORT
On April 4th we will have our election of officers for 2016-17.

Mary Kivlihan has graciously agreed to serve as the new Treasurer. I will certainly vote for her!!
Jean Dell

As of March 7, 2016 we have 21 paid members.
Black, Barb
Brown, Ruth
Breon-Drish, Marlys
Donovan, Dottie
Geib, Carol
Hemm, Tammie
Jones, Brenda
Kent, Dan & Juliene
Klodt, Richard & Nancy
Kramer, Joyce
Parker, Marsha
Phillips, Gary
Richardson, Sue
Rooker, Stan & Fran
Ross, Jean Ann
Twedt, Gary & Gwen
Valentine, Larry

Note: Both Jean and Richard have confirmed that our account at South Ottumwa has been closed and the funds transferred to the Extension Operating Account.
On March 8, Jean delivered cash and checks for membership dues, totaling $85 to Jess at the Extension office. On March 17, Jess wrote a check for $25 from our account for a donation to Tenco. Our account balance should be $749.65 as of March 26, 2016 (has not yet been confirmed by Jess).

YOUR MONTHLY WEATHER REVIEW
Whether it’s cold or whether it’s hot; we shall have weather, whether or not!

If the ice and snow lays in the creeks and rivers and melts away, it will be a long dry summer. That old saying may very well come true this year. The ice and snow did melt away, and when this El Nino does end, it could very well turn hot and dry this summer. It was around the 6th of March when WHO radio said that the low on that day, 56 degrees, would break the record for being the warmest on record for this early in the year. Then on Friday, March 11th, the frogs were very prominently croaking, and the old saying is: When the frogs croak in the Spring before Easter, there will be 3 more weeks of cool weather. This old saying is holding true so far. Monday morning, March 21st, saw hard freezes across the central Great Plains with readings down to the single digits from eastern Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska. Single digit readings were reported in parts of Kansas and Nebraska with teens as far south as northern Texas. We will have a few days of brief warm-ups, but expect several more spells of cold air and frosts or freezes before this early Spring is over. The old saying: A green Christmas, a white Easter. We had the green Christmas and we are within days of having a white Easter. We just had some snow and it is forecast for the middle of this week before Easter and as a possibility for Easter day. We had
thunder this morning, March 23rd, and the old saying is: Thunder in March means a fruitful but sorrowful year. We will have to wait this one out and see what it means---sounds rather contradictory.

During the second week of March, flooding rains fell in the Mississippi Delta regions, Louisiana and Arkansas whereas in parts of the northern and central Great Plains there was dust blowing and extremely dry conditions exist. The Louisiana and Mississippi rainfall event, over 5 days of rain and over two feet of water, are described as a “historic flood event” effecting over 2 million people by these massive storms, some of the worst flooding in close to 1,000 years. We are expected to receive more rain during the next full moon cycle, which is March 23 to 30th. Remember that a green Christmas means a white Easter. December was very wet, at least wetter than usual. However, January and February of this year are drier than usual for the typical El Nino in Ottumwa. Precipitation through March 7th of this year for the Ottumwa area has been only .85 inches of moisture, which is only 32% of normal. In all other parts of Iowa, except the East Central and Southeast areas of Iowa, El Nino has produced up to about 3 times the amount of moisture that we have received. The total precipitation for the winter months for Iowa in general, which includes December, January and February, at 6.57 inches is about double the normal precipitation and beat the old record of 6 inches that occurred more than a century ago during the winter of 1914-15 according to State Climatologist Harry Hilliker.

In contrast, southern California had a disappointing El Nino year as many of their stations report that they received only about 50% of their normal rainfall, so they will continue their massive drought into its fifth year. The northern and central portions of California should end up at or above normal levels of rainfall.

El Nino is responsible for the big rise in global temperatures in February. According to NOAA, February was the warmest in recorded history as readings were 2.43 degrees Fahrenheit above the 20th Century average. El Nino has weakened over the last few weeks. Australian scientists agree because their weather appears to be returning to normal. There are signs here in the U.S. that dryness is increasing across the western portions of the Great Plains and is expected to move eastward this summer into Iowa. It is predicted that we will receive rain on Easter Sunday and the old saying is: Rain on Easter means that it will rain on Sunday for the next 7 Sundays.

Nothing ever stays the same. Wisdom? No matter what happens, there is always someone who knew it would.

Your weatherman,
Richard Klodt

UPCOMING EVENTS:
At SEIDA (sponsored by the United Way):

**Nutrient Rich Food Via Feeding the Soil**

On Tuesday, March 29, United Way, in partnership with SEIDA Community Action, is sponsoring a class on amending the soil for optimum gardens.

Noon-1:30 pm at the SEIDA building 725 W 2nd Street. Bring your lunch.

Free; registration is helpful, but not required (call UW to register 641d-682-1264)

At Wapello County Extension Office:

**All About Compost Class**: This class will offer a general overview of different composting methods, with an emphasis on vermicomposting. Participants will be given the chance to build their own miniature worm bins, to hopefully start vermicomposting at home.

April 5th at 6pm at ISU Extension

Cost $5

Call to reserve a spot
Plant the “Right of Way” Lunch and Learn on April 8th from 12:00-1pm: Focus is on planting that area of your yard between the sidewalk and the street. Class includes lunch. Cost $5. Call the Extension to register.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES
If you’re interested in helping with Earth Week activities at Liberty Elementary, please contact Jen to find out more about school-based projects. We hope to have several classes out in the garden during Earth Week, and extra help is always appreciated!

We need to move bricks from Pioneer Ridge to Liberty. We’ll spend one work session removing the bricks from PR, and another one setting up and herb spiral at Liberty with the bricks. The first half of the project (digging up bricks) will be April 8th at 2pm. The second half (putting together an herb spiral) is TBD. Call Jen at 641-682-5491 if you’re interested in either project.

Finally, we need 2-3 volunteers to commit to helping pack food boxes for our “Inspiring Better Bites” program this summer. We’ll be sourcing produce from several local producers, and packing them in boxes that are purchased by people in the community. We need a couple of volunteers to commit to the 4 Tuesday afternoon (5/24, 6/7, 6/21, and 7/5), for 1-2 hours each time. Let Jen know ASAP if you’re interested.

EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER MANUAL
For those of you who have taken the Master Gardener training and have questions about certification, recertification, using the “Master Gardener” title, definition of volunteer categories, etc., the manual can be viewed at http://www.mastergardener.iastate.edu/info/volunteermanual.pdf. Pages 9 through 16 are especially helpful.

For any club members who have not taken the Master Gardener class, but are considering it, this manual will explain what is expected of them, and also will explain the difference between taking the class for “self improvement” and for “community service”.

EDUCATIONAL FEATURE
Planting, Growing and Maintaining Strawberries
(from ISU Extension Yard & Garden Newsletter)

What would be a suitable planting site for strawberries?
When selecting a planting site, choose an area that receives full sun and has a well-drained soil. Planting sites should receive at least six hours of direct sunlight per day. Leaf and root diseases are often problems in poorly drained, wet soils. Do not plant in areas that are heavily infested with perennial weeds. Perennial weeds, such as quackgrass, are extremely difficult to control in a strawberry planting. Also, avoid sites where strawberries, tomatoes, potatoes and peppers have been grown in the last two years to prevent possible root disease problems.
**Which strawberry varieties perform well in Iowa?**

Suggested June-bearing strawberry cultivars for Iowa include: ‘Earliglow,’ ‘Allstar,’ ‘Honeoye,’ ‘Surecrop,’ ‘Redchief,’ ‘Jewel’ and ‘Kent.’ ‘Fort Laramie’ and ‘Ogallala’ are good everbearing cultivars. ‘Tribute,’ ‘Seascape’ and ‘Albion’ are the best performing day-neutral cultivars.

**What are the differences between the three types of strawberries?**

The three types of strawberries differ in growth, flowering and fruiting characteristics.

June-bearing strawberries develop flower buds in late summer and fall as the day length shortens, nights become longer and temperatures cool. The following spring, flowering occurs and the fruit typically ripen in the month of June. The plants are strictly vegetative during the summer months. June-bearing strawberries produce runners during the long days, short nights and high temperatures of summer. June-bearers are the most widely planted type of strawberry.

Everbearing strawberries produce late spring and late summer to early fall crops with little or no flowering and fruiting during the remainder of the year. Everbearers produce few runners and tend to form several crowns.

Day-neutral strawberries are regarded as improved, more productive everbearing-type strawberries. Day-neutral refers to the response of the plants to day length. Day-neutral strawberries are not strongly influenced by day length and may flower and set fruit throughout the summer months. Day-neutral cultivars perform best during the cooler periods of the growing season and are not very productive during hot weather.

**When is the best time to plant strawberries?**

Early spring (late March to early May) is the best time to plant strawberries in Iowa.

**What is the proper way to plant strawberries?**

When ready to plant, trim off the older leaves, place the roots of the plants in water for an hour, then plant immediately. Set each plant in the ground so the crown of the plant is even with the soil surface.

The type of strawberry determines plant spacing. June-bearing strawberries should be planted 18 to 24 inches apart in rows spaced four feet apart. Runners will develop and root freely to form a matted row about two feet wide. Everbearing and day-neutral strawberries are typically planted in beds consisting of two or three rows. Space rows one foot apart. Plants are spaced one foot apart within the rows. A 2-foot-wide path should separate the beds. Any runners that develop on everbearing and day-neutral strawberries should be removed and the plants maintained as large, single plants.

Immediately after planting, water the strawberry plants and apply a starter fertilizer solution to aid establishment. A starter fertilizer solution can be prepared by dissolving one or two tablespoons of an all-purpose garden fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, in one gallon of water. Apply one to two cups to each plant. A starter fertilizer solution can also be prepared using a water-soluble fertilizer. Follow label directions when preparing the solution.

**MUSINGS OF THE MONTH**

I do not like these roll-a-coaster temperatures we have been having. I have done quite a bit of garden cleanup, but have a lot more to do before things get much taller. All of my early yellow daffodils were in bloom by March 15th! They made quite a spectacular show surrounded by the snow/sleet we had this past week. The early spring weeds are all doing well (chickweed and creeping veronica).
I don’t know why I have never used my weed eater to whack off dead plant matter before, but I have found it works great if the dead foliage is not wet. After I chop it off, then I just rake it all up and dispose of it. There seems to be less bending over and my back is much happier! I have been studying up on raising dahlias, as I have never grown them (successfully). My step granddaughter is getting married in August and I suggested dahlias as an alternative to peonies (which is what she really wanted). I did say there were no guarantees! I am looking forward to one of my favorite springtime rites, attending the Knoxville Garden Gala, in a couple of weeks.

Happy Gardening!

Carol Geib, Newsletter Editor
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