



## Early Spring Blooming Perennials

# Allamakee County Master Gardener Seeds of Wisdom

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### Upcoming Dates to Remember

Mark your Calendars now with these upcoming events. See page 9 for more information.

- April 9—Jet's Gathering
- April 11—MG Annual Dinner
- April 25—MG Meeting
- May 11—FFA Plant Sale
- May 17—MG Plant Sale Prep
- May 18—MG/FFA Plant Sale
- June 14-16—Big 4 Fair
- June 27—MG Potluck
- July 17-21—Allamakee County Fair

"I think that no matter how old or infirm I may become, I will always plant a large garden in the Spring. Who can resist the feelings of hope and joy that one gets from participating in nature's rebirth." Edward Giobbi

### Allamakee County Master Gardener Meeting

Thursday, April 25, 2024  
Waukon Wellness Center Activity Room  
7:00 PM

**Hostesses:** Jane Meyer and Clara Lensing

**Roll Call:** Did you start flowers or vegetables?

**Secretary's Minutes:** published in this newsletter

**Treasurer's Report:**

Motions needed for MG plant sale change

**Old Business:**

Host/Hostesses signup  
Master Gardener Scholarship  
Elections

**New Business:**

Dollar amount for MG Scholarship and awardee  
Dollar amount for change box for plant sale  
County Fair planter boxes (4-H does the big round planters)  
Mileage reimbursement for Garden Symposium carpooling  
Junior Master Gardener program  
Open Class exhibit informational presentations at county libraries

**Next Meeting:** August 22, Waukon Wellness Center 7:00 PM  
Hostesses: Connie Benedict and Kayla Bjerke

### Subscribe to the Iowa Master Gardener YouTube Channel

The Iowa Master Gardener YouTube channel is your one-stop archive for all Home Gardening Webinar recordings. Recordings will be added once they are processed after the live event.

Waiting for a specific recording to be released?  
Subscribe to the channel to be notified when a new recording is available.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoyB28Aj3qOovjpwncSiLBq>

## Master Gardener February Meeting Minutes— Kayla Bjerke

Date: February 17, 2024

Location: Waukon Wellness Center

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM by Clara Lensing. The roll call question was: What “new for you” are you planting this year?. 14 members answered. Minutes of the October meeting were approved as printed. The Treasurer’s report was given. A motion and second was made and the report approved.

Judy Egeland provided a bill for seeds and the invoice was approved to be paid. Phyllis Baker gave a summary of her trip to the Madison Garden Expo. There was a brief discussion regarding planning a group to go next year.

It was brought to Clara’s attention that the FFA plant sale will not be on May 11 as posted in the newsletter as Jessica will be out of the state. No new date was given at this time. The Master Gardener sale remains set for May 18. Mary Engstrom stated that the Allamakee County Fair Board had their meeting on February 19 to approve the use of the show barn for the plant sale. One more table will be set up at the end of each row this year. Mary will get more supplies to extend the line for signage.

Lana is working on a project through the Extension Office to promote local food production and asked if we would like bags of soil to give out at the plant sale. The only stipulation to obtain a bag is to purchase a vegetable from the sale. More information about this will be obtained around March 1.

Two boxes of seeds from Seed Savers were delivered and it has been decided to have one box of seeds available at the plant sale for people to pick up. Reminder to keep an eye out for jumping worms when you harvest perennials for the plant sale.

Night out is April 11, 2024 at the Old Rossville Store. Please let Mary Engstrom know if you are attending. Don Haler made a motion to appoint Joe Swizdor as the new President with all other positions remaining occupied by the same individuals. Mary Engstrom second the motion with all members in agreement. Thank you to Clara for her extended time as President!

Judy Egeland gave a presentation on starting perennial flowers in plastic milk jugs and other plastic drink containers.

A motion was made by Joe Swizdor to establish a plant sale committee. Sue Cahoon second the motion. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 AM with a motion from Mary Engstrom and second by Judy Egeland. The next meeting is April 25, 2024 at 7:00 PM at the Wellness Center. Thank you to hosts Caroll Schreiber and Susan Cahoon.

## Buchanan County Symposium Pictures — Joe Swizdor



“April hath put a spirit of youth in everything.” William Shakespeare

## Aloha—Joe Swizdor, Master Gardener President

Aloha! We have some excellent community engagement events coming up in April and May, see the last page of the newsletter for dates.

I am looking forward to attending Preserving the Taste of Summer Workshops at Ms. B's and hope to have some great recipes to share.

I would also like to thank the effort of the Master Gardener Volunteers that assisted in starting the "Plant Sale" seeds at the Waukon High School greenhouse.

The following link (scroll all the down) has past years newsletters available.

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/allamakee/master-gardener-program> I have found it easier to read and it is in color.

## Thymely Tidbits—Pat Meeter

In order for me to write about trying something new, I first needed to go back to something old. We first tried growing a Marconi pepper plant—just one— a few years ago. It grew large beautiful peppers, but I wasn't sure what to do with them. Green peppers don't agree with some of the family, so I ate a few, added some to canned salsa and gave the rest away. I didn't realize at the time that the Marconi peppers develop a sweet, smokey flavor when bright red. That is the premium time to harvest and enjoy them.

This year I am growing a Thunderbolt hybrid sweet pepper. It is part of the Marconi family but called an Italian Roasting pepper. It should be 7"-12" long and bright red when mature. This pepper won't be as fat as the previous one that we grew, but should be longer and more tapering.

One of my girls brought a bag full to a cook out last summer. Some she lightly oiled, then grilled. When charred she rubbed off the skins and put on burgers. Delicious! The next day she seeded, sliced and stir fried in butter with onions, garlic and zucchini for a side dish. Barely cooked and still crunchy, these were also quite good. Tonya claimed that using just the peppers and onions on a Philly Cheesesteak sandwich was a big hit and I'm anxious to try. She had also stuffed with ground beef and rice or quinoa and baked for a variation of stuffed peppers. I was sold and these will be my new garden item.

I've been reading up on growing methods and found that these peppers need closer to 8 hours of sun to produce best. Keep them well watered and provide a little shade cloth if we hit any of those 100 degree days as they can sunburn. They can grow 2+ feet, so include a stake when preparing your planting area. We have a couple of mineral tubs that have been successful growing areas for our peppers. We put 4 drainage holes in the bottom and a couple about 3" up the sides of the tubs. It is a bit of a pain to empty every fall and refill in the spring, but they give extra growing spots and can be set where they'll receive maximum sunlight. There are always sticks and pine cones to fill the bottom few inches with. We just make sure we add extra nitrogen to compensate for the cones. Next comes potting soil, compost, perlite and a 4' stake for support. Feed the peppers every 2 weeks using an organic liquid fertilizer. I'm hoping for a bountiful harvest.

## Peppers

Learn about different pepper cultivars, planting, potential problems, harvesting and storage, and pepper hotness in your home garden. The Extension Store offers an array of publications for your home gardening needs.

Visit the store at for pepper publication mentioned above

<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/5479>

## Slow Cooker Stuffed Pepper Soup

### Ingredients

- 1 lb extra-lean ground beef
- 1 cup [onion](#) diced
- 14.5 oz diced tomatoes with basil, oregano, garlic
- 2 cups green peppers and/or red peppers chopped
- 15 oz [tomato sauce](#)
- 3 cup [beef broth](#)
- 1/2 teaspoon [dried basil](#)
- 1/2 teaspoon [dried oregano](#)
- 1 cup [cooked rice](#)

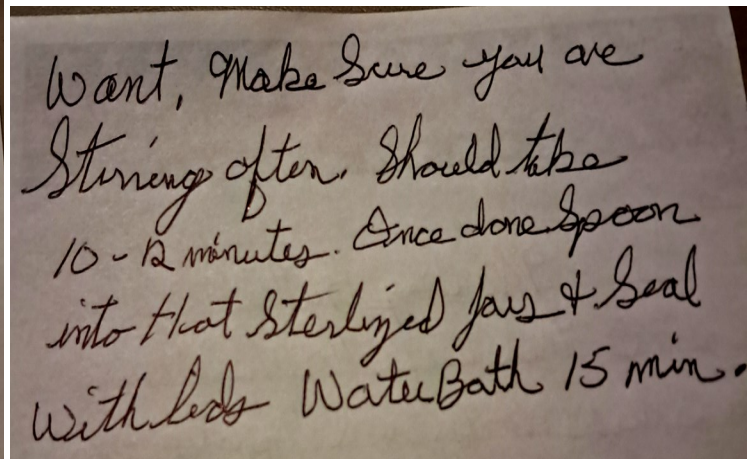
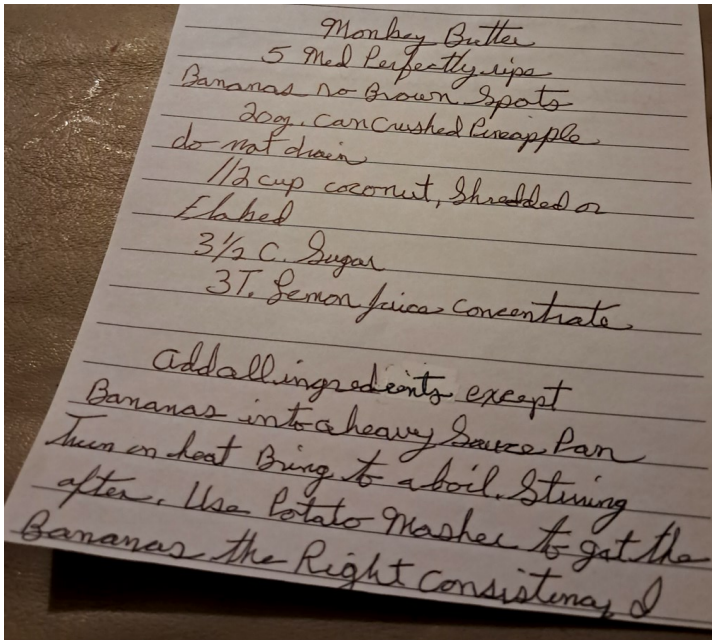
### Instructions

1. Brown your beef with your onion in a skillet over medium heat.
2. Drain your beef and onions and place in your 6-quart slow cooker.
3. Add your tomatoes (juice and all) and the rest of your ingredients.
4. Cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours.



"On April Fools' Day, believe nothing, trust no one, just like any other day." Anon

**Monkey Butter—Diane Nolting**



**Gluten Free Italian Sausage and Vegetable Soup—CiCi Mueller**

**Ingredients**

serves 6

- 3/4lb gluten-free ground Italian sausage (mild or hot) used 1 lb.
- 1 Tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 3 small or 2 large leeks, white and light green parts only, chopped in half then sliced
- 2 medium-sized carrots, sliced (1/2 cup) I used 1 c.
- 1 celery stalk, sliced (1/2 cup) I used 1 c.
- salt and pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1 lb baby red potatoes (about 6 baby red potatoes,) chopped
- 6 cups gluten-free chicken broth
- 15oz can crushed tomatoes
- parmesan cheese rind (optional)

**Directions**

1. Brown Italian sausage in a large Dutch oven or soup pot over medium-high heat. Transfer to a plate then turn heat down to medium. Add extra virgin olive oil to the pot then add leeks, carrots, and celery, season with salt and pepper, and then saute until vegetables are tender, 5-7 minutes. Add garlic and Italian seasoning then saute until garlic is fragrant, 1-2 minutes.
2. Add potatoes, chicken broth, crushed tomatoes, parmesan cheese rind, and browned sausage to the pot then turn heat up to bring soup to a boil. Turn heat back down to medium then cover and simmer until potatoes are tender, 5-7 minutes. Taste and add salt and pepper if necessary then serve topped with freshly grated parmesan cheese.

This recipe is courtesy of Iowa Girl Eats. <http://iowagirdeats.com>.

**Sour Cream Oatmeal Cookies—Pat Meeter**

Nothing better on a cold winter afternoon than a good cookie and a cup of hot tea, or hot chocolate as you prefer.

1 & 1/2 Cup flour-1/2 tsp baking soda-1/2 tsp salt-1/2 Cup soft butter-1/2 Cup granulated sugar-1/2 Cup brown sugar-1 egg-1 tsp vanilla-1 Cup chopped dates, raisins, nuts, chocolate chips-1/2 Cup sour cream-1 Cup quick oats. Cream butter and sugars. Add egg and vanilla-add the dry ingredients alternately with the sour cream. Stir in the oats and chips. Bake @ 375 12-15 minutes. If too sticky chill for 1 hour before baking. I usually add 1 tsp cinnamon and a pinch of nutmeg. Sometimes I've substituted 1/2 Cup peanut butter for the sour cream. I've also subbed dried cranberries, walnuts even aronia berries for the dates. A very versatile recipe.

**"The best way to predict the future is to correct it." Anonymous**

## Easter Lilies — by Robin Sweetser submitted by Becky Litterer for Mary Kay Winke

How do you keep Easter lilies alive after they bloom? Do Easter lilies multiply? Are Easter lilies poisonous to pets? Learn all about caring for Easter lilies! Learn all about the pure white Easter lily (*Lilium longiflorum*). The fragrance of an Easter lily is a sign that spring is here! But like most true lilies, if left to nature, they actually wouldn't blossom until late summer. The potted plants for sale around the Easter holiday have been tricked into blooming for us at Easter by greenhouses that pot up the bulbs in the fall and treat them to a long cooling period—about 1,000 hours in cold but not freezing temperatures.

After the lilies start to sprout, they are given enough warmth and light to get them growing and budding in time for holiday sales. This can be tricky for growers to time just right since the date for Easter can vary from late March to late April.

**How to Keep Your Easter Lily Growing After Easter**—If you have a fragrant Easter lily for the holiday and want to enjoy it for years to come, you will need to plant it outside. The bulbs are winter-hardy in zones 5 to 8, but the plants do not do well in hot, humid climates.

To prepare the bulb for planting outdoors, let the flowers fade and keep watering until the leaves die back to the stem. Harden off the bulb by placing the plant outside each day for longer periods of time until it acclimates to being outdoors. After the last frost, plant it 4 to 6 inches deep in rich, well-drained soil where it will get full morning sun and some afternoon shade.

Like clematis, these lilies like their heads in the sun but their feet in the shade. If you can't shade the base of the plant, use mulch to keep the roots cool. Cut the stem off at the soil line and mark where you have planted. Fertilize it twice over the summer, and if you haven't already mulched it, apply some mulch in the fall for winter protection. If all goes well, your bulb should bloom again the next summer.

As the leaves mature, they will start to turn yellow.

Taken from <https://www.almanac.com/how-grow-and-care-easter-lillies>

## New Website Launches Just in Time for the Spring Gardening Season

For almost ten years, the Horticulture and Home Pest News website was the go-to website for home gardening information from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. The thousands of articles on everything from vegetables, to lawns, to trees, to houseplants, and everything in between now has a new home. The new [Yard and Garden website](https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu) is now available. The website now features content organized by topic area and a fresh new look that works very well on mobile devices (an important thing given 70% of all visits to the website are on mobile devices). With this change in look comes a new name and web address:

[yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu](https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu). All of these changes should make it even easier to find the information you are looking for from Iowa State Extension.

Click below to view the new and improved website and don't forget to update your bookmarks (although don't worry, even if you don't update all your links everything from the old website will redirect you to the new one!). And while you're there, don't forget to sign up for the newsletter. Both of these great resources will keep you up-to-date on all things gardening in Iowa.

**Website:** <https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/>

**Sign Up for Newsletter** <https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/get-newsletter>



## How To Thin Herb Seedlings By Jennifer Benner

Don't skip this important step when growing your edible treasures from seed. Growing herbs from seed is an incredibly rewarding and inexpensive way to savor homegrown flavor fresh from your garden. Getting the seeds to sprout is generally the easiest step. However, there are a few other essential steps for successfully nurturing seedlings into mature and useful plants. This includes providing adequate light and water as the seedlings grow. But it also includes another important step—thinning, or reducing the number of seedlings to prevent overcrowding and to allow the strongest plants to thrive. Thinning can be done in a number of different ways. Here are some common approaches.

**Pluck.** When seedlings are very young and not yet root-bound, you can gently pull out and remove less vigorous ones from your planting container. Depending on the type of herb you are growing, plan to thin down your containers to anywhere from two to five healthy seedlings.

**Snip.** Another way to thin is by trimming less vigorous seedlings all the way down to soil level using scissors. This method is especially useful if your seedlings are root-bound or heavily intertwined. Snipping the unwanted plants rather than plucking them prevents damaging the keepers.

**Divide.** When seedlings have established a healthy root system, they are strong enough to withstand an early division and transplanting. Simply water your seedlings, remove the soil clump from the container, gently split the clump into smaller clumps, and then transplant the clumps to other containers.

For more on how to thin herb seedlings, check out this video on thinning basil seedlings with kitchen garden expert Erin Walrath-Mariano. <https://www.finegardening.com/author/erin-walrath-mariano>

## Creating Raised Bed Planters—

Raised beds are popular features in the home landscape. They are both functional and attractive and can be used to grow flowers, vegetables, and small fruits.

### Advantages of Raised Beds

Raised beds are great options for vegetable gardens.

Raised beds provide several advantages over conventional garden areas. Wet, poorly drained sites can be improved by constructing raised beds. A properly prepared raised bed increases drainage, thereby promoting plant growth and increasing crop yields. Additionally, raised beds dry out and warm up earlier in the spring, allowing earlier planting. Raised beds are more convenient for elderly gardeners or physically challenged individuals with difficulty bending to the ground. The raised height of the garden enables these individuals to continue their gardening activities.

While generally minor, raised beds do have some disadvantages. Raised beds dry out faster than other garden sites. Accordingly, they have to be watered more frequently in dry weather. Initial construction of the raised bed may take more effort and resources than that of a more conventional garden bed.

### Types of Raised Beds

Raised beds may be permanent or temporary structures. Temporary raised beds are shallow beds (often 6 to 12 inches in height) constructed within the existing garden. After the garden is tilled in the spring, the loose soil is raked into raised beds with no supporting structure or walls.

Permanent beds are often higher than 6 inches, have side supports, and are built to last many years.

To find out more about raised beds; materials to build, size, soil, construction etc. visit

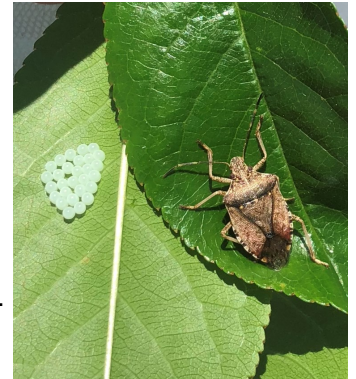
<https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/how-to/creating-raised-bed-planters>

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## What Do Warm Winter Temperatures Do to Insect Populations?—Zach Schumm

A common question we have been receiving in the Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinic (PIDC) is if the warmer winter temperatures we have been experiencing in Iowa will result in increased insect and arthropod abundance this summer. Will there be more ticks? What about other insects like mosquitoes and boxelder bugs? Well, the short answer is it depends and remains to be seen for many. In addition, more than just temperature will have an impact on insect populations. Things like precipitation can also be a huge factor. Conditions will affect different species differently, and it's impossible to know what to expect from every species.

Brown marmorated stink bug with an egg mass.



Insects have several mechanisms for surviving winter. Some migrate to warmer areas (monarch butterflies, for example). Others may stick around and rely on other strategies, like the biological “antifreeze” that insects have in their blood. This can allow survival even if temperatures drop well below freezing. Certainly, there are temperatures that are too cold and will cause death, but those temperatures aren't always reached to an extent that will significantly impact insect populations (and on top of that, every species will have a slightly different lethal temperature that must be reached to cause death). So, it's arguable that you can experience fewer of some insects after a very cold and long winter, but a warmer winter does not necessarily mean that we should expect the opposite.

In fact, I can think of more cases where warmer weather negatively impacts insects rather than benefitting them. Take brown marmorated stink bug for example, that can overwinter in our homes and human structures and become a nuisance. If it gets too warm during the winter, they can become active, use up fat/energy reserves before plants have emerged to provide additional food, and they can die if cold weather returns or if they starve from no food availability outside.

Inevitably, some species may do better after warm winters, and others may do worse. But if anything, warm and abnormal winters in Iowa probably have a net negative impact on insects, particularly when considering that a lot of insects are emerging (including pollinators and other beneficial insects) when there is no food available for them yet.

So, the short answer is that it is impossible to predict how every insect will respond to a warmer winter. But that is partly because we have not yet discovered every insect in Iowa, and we are far from understanding the biology of each individual species we have discovered and described. If you're going hiking in warm weather and you're worried about ticks or mosquitoes, it's probably best to be proactive about them at any time, and not worry about them more just due to a warmer winter.

Q. “What is the first thing that a gardener plants in the garden?” A. Their feet.

## Essential Gardening Chores for Early Spring— by Robin Sweester submitted by Mary Kay Winke

It's spring! How do you get the outdoor garden ready? We're going to gently get started, being careful not to wake up those overwintering beneficial insects if it's still too cool or wet. Here are my early spring gardening tasks and tips.

I spent the end of February in the Texas Hill Country, where the gardens are at least three months ahead of mine in New Hampshire. The redbuds, irises, and poppies were in bloom, and the famous bluebonnets were popping up here and there.

Gardening in Texas is quite a different experience from gardening in New England. While gardeners in Texas can grow cold-hardy crops all winter long, they need to get the warm-weather plants up and growing before the deadly hot weather sets in. While most of the country loves summer, they worry about long heat waves and drought.

Hardy crops like lettuce, kale, beets, and carrots have been growing over the winter in the San Marcos Community Garden.

Needless to say, it was hard to come home to a frozen garden. I had to stop myself from jumping in to clean up too early.

### Early Spring Gardening Chores

If you live in an area of the country that is closer to New Hampshire than it is to Texas, here are some early spring chores you may need to start working on:

Don't be too eager! If your garden is like a soupy mud pie, let it dry out some more before you even think about stepping foot in it. Soggy soil is easily compacted. If you absolutely must get in there, use stepping stones or put down boards to walk on. See when the soil is ready for planting.

Gently press frost-heaved plants back into the ground.

Delay clean up until overwintering beneficial insects wake up. Wait until you've had several days of 50 degree or higher temperatures to give them a chance of survival.

The first thing I do is pick up sticks. There are always loads of sticks and branches that have fallen over the winter. It is a good first step before raking and gives you a chance to assess how things have overwintered while you walk around gathering fallen branches.

Gently rake the early bloomers first so they can poke up out of the soil without having to lift leaves and debris too.

Clip off old, tattered leaves of hellebores and epimediums, perennials that bloom with the first breath of spring.

Give ornamental grasses their annual haircut before new growth begins. Leave 8-12 inches of old stubble standing above the crown to keep spring rains from flattening soft new growth and to preserve this year's growing tips.

Wait until after spring-blooming shrubs blossom to prune them. Instead, finish up pruning broken branches.

See the Almanac's [When to Prune What Guide](#).

This is a good time to remove dead rose canes.

Rake, rake, rake, especially where bulbs, daylilies, and peonies are planted to avoid snapping off brittle new shoots.

Peony tips are very brittle when they first emerge. Take care when cleaning up around them.

Before the buds open up and leaves emerge, dig up and move or divide overgrown perennials. It will be less stressful for them.

Take time to remove any weeds as they pop up. They are much easier to deal with now.

Violets may be pretty in bloom, but they are a terrible weed in my garden. It's easy to pull them out now, and very difficult to wait until later.

If you haven't tested your soil in a while, now is a good time to take a sample and send it off to be tested. You will receive guidelines for the proper amendments to add.

Ready to plant vegetables? Before planting, check the soil temperature. Peas need at least 45 degree soil to germinate. Or look to nature and wait until the forsythia blooms to plant them. Other vegetables that can be planted early include beets, carrots, radishes, spinach, lettuce, and chard. See the Almanac's [best planting dates by zip code](#).

Pot up begonia tubers and other summer flowering bulbs to give them a head start.

If the kids are home, enlist their aid in the garden. It will give them some fresh air and exercise and can serve as an outdoor classroom. I'll have more on gardening with children in a future post.

Taken from <https://www.almanac.com/15-early-spring-gardening-tasks>

**"The trouble with practical jokes is that very often they get elected." Will Rogers**

Please join us on the second Tuesday of the month at Jet's Café at 10:30 for an informal gathering.

Tuesday, April 9	Monthly informal gathering, 10:30 a.m.	Jet's Café
Thursday, April 11	MG annual dinner, 5 p.m.	Rossville
Thursday, April 25	MG meeting at 7 p.m.	Wellness Center
Saturday, May 11	FFA Plant Sale	Waukon HS Greenhouse
Tuesday, May 14	Monthly informal gathering, 10:30 a.m.	Jet's Café
Saturday, May 18	MG/FFA plant sale	Fairgrounds
Tuesday, June 11	Monthly informal gathering, 10:30 a.m.	Jet's Café
June 14-16	Big 4 Fair	Postville
Thursday, June 27	MG potluck w/spouse 6:00 p.m.	TBA
Tuesday, July 9	Monthly informal gathering, 10:30 a.m.	Jet's Café
Saturday, July 13	Clean open class exhibit building	Fairgrounds
July 17-21	Allamakee County Fair	Waukon
Tuesday, August 13	Monthly informal gathering, 10:30 a.m.	Jet's Café
Thursday, August 22	MG meeting 7 p.m. (Plant swap?)	Wellness Center
Tuesday, September 10	Monthly informal gathering, 10:30 a.m.	Jet's Café
Tuesday, October 8	Monthly informal gathering, 10:30 a.m.	Jet's Café
Saturday, October 26	MG meeting 10 a.m.	Wellness Center
Tuesday, November 12	Monthly informal gathering, 10:30 a.m.	Jet's Café
Tuesday, December 10	Monthly informal gathering, 10:30 a.m.	Jet's Café
Tuesday, January 14,	Monthly informal gathering, 10:30 a.m.	Jet's Café
Tuesday, February 11,	Monthly informal gathering, 10:30 a.m.	Jet's Café
Saturday, February 15,	MG meeting 10 a.m.	Wellness Center

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“April is the kindest month. April gets you out of your head and out working in the garden.”  
- Marty Rubin

“I think that no matter how old or infirm I may become, I will always plant a large garden in the Spring. Who can resist the feelings of hope and joy that one gets from participating in nature’s rebirth.”  
Edward Giobbi

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## Master Gardener Hours

Are you keeping track of your volunteer service hours? How about your continuing education hours? Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Master Gardener program has a website to make logging your hours easier. Sign in to the Volunteer Reporting System here <https://mastergardenerhours.hort.iastate.edu/> to log your hours.

The Master Gardener program encourages you to complete 10 hours of continuing education hours and 20 volunteer hours. Didn't get them all in? That's ok, report your hours anyway!

Don't wait until December to report your Master Gardener volunteer and continuing education hours for the year. Record them now so that it doesn't become a huge task at the end of the year. We know that you are doing great things as Master Gardener volunteers. Let us know about them!

Paper copy of the reporting form can be found here <https://mastergardenerhours.hort.iastate.edu/>

Always remember ~ have fun in the garden!

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