

JOHNSON COUNTY IOWA MASTER GARDENERS

Johnson County Master Gardener Project Leader Annual Report



Name of Core Project: Plum Grove Gardens
1030 Carroll St, Iowa City

Name(s) of Project Leader(s): Gardens: Darlene Clausen, Carolyn Murphy, Lavon Yeggy

Provide a brief statement of the involvement/impact for the project: Plum Grove Historic Home is a gated state site open to the public from Memorial Day through Labor Day, 1-5pm, Tuesday through Sunday. The heritage gardens were designed over 28 years ago by Johnson County Master Gardeners and are still maintained by JCMG today.

Master Gardeners Involved:

Twenty regular garden volunteers. Megan Garrels, Marge Jensen, Michelle Frauenholtz, Ramona McGurk, Chris Sedrel, Pat Quiles, Barb Robinson, Angela Murphy, Sadia Embree, Dorothy Fowls, Holly Hotchkiss, Mike Murphy, Joanne Leach, Helen Donta, Melissa Close, Patrick Rossman, Lori Stanley, Darlene Clausen, Carolyn Murphy, Lavon Yeggy

Please include a description of project impact:

Gardens – Work in the gardens started March 7 this year and continued through the end of October.

Friendly's Vegetable Garden –

Led by Darlene Clausen, was tended by Sadia Embree, Holly Hotchkiss, Helene Donta, Patrick Rossman, and Melissa Close. In March, Helene, Sadia, and Darlene built a pea trellis out of apple wood allowing us to have an early pea crop. Planting was underway in April. Instead of planting tomatoes and corn, we planted 6 varieties of beans in addition to carrots, cabbage, brussels sprouts, sweet potatoes fingerling potatoes, peppers, eggplants, beets, and parsnips as annual crops. We grew Hopi Amaranth and harvested it



hopefully to prepare a dish for the 2024 Taste of the Heritage Garden. We also had many perennial herbs, rhubarb, and onions. All seeds were heirloom. Temporary repairs to the fencing were made to keep out rabbits. It was an ongoing battle joined by a young buck who enjoyed eating vegetables, especially beans and sweet potatoes. Our largest contribution to the foodbank was 72# of Concord grapes. In 2024 we plan on rebuilding the picket fence and providing better support for the grapes. Helene led the work on the

compost pile making it much easier to use.



Grandma's Heirloom Flower & Questor's Rose Garden,

led by Carolyn Murphy, was tended to by Angela Murphy, Holly Hotchkiss, Barb Robinson, Pat Quiles, Lori Stanely and Mike Murphy. The group has done an excellent job over the past few years planting heirloom perennials and with a few annual plants to add color and texture, so we have flowers blooming all summer.

We start quite a few of the annual seeds indoors although we do plant some seeds directly in the soil when the weather warms in the spring. With the drought conditions this past summer we did need to water new plantings and seeds on a regular basis. We accomplished that by setting up a watering schedule and each person picking a day. The wire fencing needs to be replaced next year to prevent rabbits from eating the plants. We have also budgeted for replacing the wood posts that have rotted and some of the wood fencing. It will be a busy spring.



Native Wildflower Garden, led by Lavon Yeggy and helped by Michelle Frauenholtz, Megan Garrels, Marge Jensen, Ramona McGurk, Dorothy Fowles and several others over the summer. We continued to maintain perennial native plants and adding a few new ones to achieve our goal of continuous blooms from April (bluebells) through October (goldenrod, asters). We also added some more plants not usually seen in local gardens



(prickly pear, prairie dock, rattlesnake master). We've found these are very popular at the various events held at Plum Grove. We have continued the challenge of weeding out natives that are too invasive (goldenrod, Jerusalem artichoke, and Cup plant). There was very little wild onion to pull this year, and a lot less J. artichoke.

We had additional volunteers who came to help dig Mayapples for the sale, with enough to give out to the volunteer diggers for their gardens. Cup plant was donated to those with room for it, and 2 prairie plots. Repairs were done on front split rail fence, with more work needed in 2024. Our biggest goal for 2024 will be to finish the brick path started by original garden planners.



Provide a summary of project activities conducted throughout the calendar year and the results of the project (include data of the success(es) of the project and or partner(s)).

The gardens are open to the public Tuesday through Sunday, 1-5pm. People tour the gardens during events such as Taste of Heritage and the Tomato tasting. Sunday guides are available Sunday afternoons during the summer.

Events held.

Plum Grove Taste of the Heritage Garden

PG Tomato Tasting

This event was held July 12th, 5:30-7pm. The menu consisted of heritage soups, salads, vegetables, breads, and desserts prepared by the master gardeners. Due to threatening storm forecast and previous rain during the week, the backup plan was put into place, and the event was moved to the Jo Co Extension Building. Thank you to all that helped us with this change. We had a smaller crowd and that was to be expected with the location change. I believe this is only the fourth time in 26 years that the location was moved due to weather. We were pleased to see some of our loyal followers from the Lucas Farms Neighborhood enjoy the music, food, ice cream and flower arrangements. Carolyn picked a bouquet of flowers from all three of the Plum Gardens and gave as the first door prize. A short program was given, and flower bouquets were given out. There were around 50 master gardeners involved with this project, 56 paying guests, 5 Old Post Office Brass Band members, and Donna Dane present (around 100 people). Donna was kind enough to bring the ice cream and cooler for the evening. We made the choice to pay for the ice cream (\$115) this year as it has become a highlight of the event. In the past, Donna has donated ice cream, in memory of her mother. Allie Dane was a long-time master gardener. And as in previous years, a donation of \$150 was made to the Old Post Office Brass Band. 27 cookbooks were sold at \$1.00 each. Donations from the evening totaled \$411.80. We do not have the total bills for this event yet. Thank you to all the cooks, servers, setup/teardown crew, bouquet makers, greeters, coordinators, and everyone that helped with this event. Plum Grove Heritage Garden Committee, Darlene Clausen, Lavon Yeggy, Carolyn Murphy, Beth Fisher



Taste of the Heirloom Tomatoes

The tomato tasting was held Thursday, Aug. 31, 2023 from 5:30 p, to 7:00 pm. Event planning committee members were Darlene Clausen, Lavon Yeggy, Megan Garrels, and Melissa Close. Carolyn Murphy was an advisor. Volunteers for the event included the planning committee and Master Gardeners: Doug Geraets, Roger Jenson, Chris Smith, Steve Lyons, Jeff Walberg, Sadia Embree, Fred Meyer, Karen Miller, Janice Hining, Sue Kloos, Esther Retish, Marilyn Kempnich, Barb Schintler, Barb Robinson, Marge Jensen, Leah Latella, Kristin Ho, Helene Donta, and Holly Hotchkiss. Linda Schneider wrote and distributed a press release. Melissa Close contacted the Lucas Farms Facebook administrator. Volunteers signed up either by Sign Up Genius or by contacting Darlene Clausen. Darlene Clausen and Melissa Close served as emcees. We brought in \$128. There were approximately 30 – 35 attendees. A suggested donation of \$4 was requested. Rental of the speaker system from Aero Rental was \$66.17. No other expenses were incurred. Twenty-two recipe booklets from the Taste of the Heritage Garaden at Plum Grove were sold for \$1 each. Twenty varieties of tomatoes were contributed by Master Gardeners. There were 9 categories for comparisons. Categories were cherry tomatoes, paste tomatoes, sand slicers. Categories were further divided by color. An additional question asked voters to guess which tomatoes were hybrids. Our education effort was to describe the uses for each tomato type on the ballot. We also tried to show the difference between hybrid and heirloom tomatoes.



Samples of Tomato jam and Brethren cheddar bread were served. Melissa Close made the jams and Lavon Yeggy made the bread. The jams were Red Tomato Jam and Yellow Tomato Basil Jam. Recipes were found online. Ingredients were donated by makers.

Door prizes were drawn. Four bouquets were made by Master Gardeners, the book *Ten Tomatoes That Changed*

the World by William Alexander was donated by Prairie Lights, two \$25 gift cards were donated by Hills Bank, and a gift bag of Plum Grove plum sauce, grape preserves, and jars of the tomato jams with recipe booklets from the Taste of the Heritage Garden Tastings in 2022 and 2023 were given.



Plum Tree seedlings planted at Plum Grove Historic Home

After several failed attempts to grow plum trees from seed, we have now succeeded. The timing must have been right as the three of us (Carolyn and Mike Murphy, and Mahmooda Ahmad) ended up producing 12 seedlings.

After a conversation with Alex McKendree, the Johnson County Historical Society Executive Director, we received permission to plant the seedlings, which will help sustain the grove of wild plum trees in front of the house near the brick walkway. Betty Kelly, founder of the gardens, noted that she had started the wild plum trees from seed she collected on site many years ago and had hoped when the time came another master gardener would do the same. Mike and Carolyn Murphy planted the plum seedlings in mid-September. Milk jugs with several small holes worked well to keep the seedlings watered for several days. Wire cages were added to protect the trees from rabbits and deer damage. Tree watering bags will be added next year.



Statement of what you consider the greatest success of this project:

The number of master gardener volunteers and hours spent at this historical site I believe speaks for itself. The public enjoy these gardens and events all summer.

498.8 volunteers with 20 regular master gardeners recorded for the 3 gardens.

141 volunteer hours with 50 master gardeners involved with the Taste of the Heritage Gardens party.

88.6 volunteer hours with 24 master gardeners involved with the Taste of the Heirloom Tomatoes party.

What are the needs to help this project continue? What changes would you consider making for the future?

Recruiting new volunteers

We have requested money from the general funds to replace/repair fencing in all three gardens. We will recruit additional volunteers to help with the fencing projects.

Project Leaders

Darlene Clausen, Carolyn Murphy, Lavon Yeggy

Date