



Johnson County Master Gardener

THYMES

February 2022

MG Steering Committee Meeting

Wednesday, Feb. 9, 7 P.M., virtual Zoom meeting will continue. Interested MGs are invited to participate—contact Shannon for instructions!

Thymes Deadline



Information/articles for the Thymes should be sent to Melissa Serenda at msserenda@gmail.com or Doug Geraets at: dougrph@aol.com.

Please send news, volunteer opportunities, stories, pictures, gardening book reviews, etc., for the **March** issue by **Friday, Feb. 25**.

Project GREEN 2022 Garden Forums



Dr. Benjamin Vogt will present some very timely information via Zoom on Sunday, Feb. 13, at 2 P.M. Sign up for the presentation at the Iowa City Public Library or watch on the Library's YouTube channel. With all of us struggling to modify our gardens for the

increased summer heat, cycles of drought and excessive rain events, he will address the “Fundamentals of Garden Layers.” Benjamin will discuss learning from natural plant communities to increase ecosystem function and climate resilience at home in our own gardens. From the fundamentals of plant succession over the years to using plant

reproduction and habit to fill ecological niches, the right native plant communities make all the difference for beautiful gardens that both wildlife and people crave.

Benjamin is the author of *A New Garden Ethic: Cultivating Defiant Compassion for an Uncertain Future* and the forthcoming *Prairie Up: An Introduction to Natural Garden Design* (autumn 2022). He manages the prairie-inspired design firm Monarch Gardens LLC (monarchgard.com) which focuses on urban and suburban lawn to meadow conversions. Benjamin’s award winning work has been featured in *American Gardener*, *Garden Design*, *Fine Gardening*, *Midwest Living* and *Houzz*. Benjamin lives in Lincoln, Nebraska with his wife and son.

JCMG Plant Sale & Flea Market 2022

Fundraiser Returns After Two-Year Absence

BY EMIL RINDERSPACHER



After a two-year pandemic hiatus, the Johnson County Master Gardener Plant Sale & Flea Market will be back on Saturday, May 7, at the JC Fairgrounds. Of course, as we've learned these past two years, things can change and we are moving forward with our planning with the health and

safety of volunteers and customers first and foremost on our minds.

The sale is our major fundraiser and we need Master Gardeners to donate perennials, annuals, grasses, houseplants, bulbs, tender bulbs, herbs and vegetable starts. Our goal is to have **3,000** plants to sell.

Plant Sale Changes

As you've probably read in the [July/August 2021 Thymes](#), we are making some big changes for the 2022 sale:

- To guard against spreading invasive species (e.g. Asian jumping worms) we will rely on only JCMG volunteers for plant donations and we will be repotting all our plants in sterile potting medium and clean/sterilized pots.
- All perennial donations must arrive at the JC Fairgrounds by the end of April. In past years, most donations were delivered two days before the sale and we had to scramble to get them all labeled and priced.

What Can You Donate?

I'm starting to compile a list of donors and plant donations in order to have a complete inventory of plants well in advance of the sale.



Let me know if you have plants to donate. Email me at emil-rinderspacher@uiowa.edu. Be sure to include specifics and approximate quantity (common name is fine, bloom color, cultivar if you know it). If you plan to donate but aren't sure what or how many, let me know so I can add you to our

donor list. And let me know if you are willing to start veggies, herbs, and/or annuals. We don't need type or quantity yet, but we will be in touch so we can coordinate efforts to ensure we have a variety of offerings. I'd like to hear from you by Jan. 31.

The seed and garden catalogs are starting to arrive so it's time to start thinking spring! If you have questions or want more information, email or call me. Thank you!

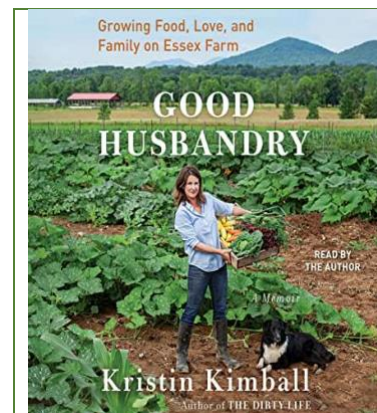
WANTED: Items For Silent Auction

FROM MIKE & CAROLYN MURPHY

The silent auction will be held during the Plant Sale & Flea Market on May 7, 2022. If you have interesting or unique yard/garden items and are willing to donate them, please let us know. We usually have a variety of items, thanks to the MGs' talents and humor. Proceeds will go towards the purchase of butterflies for the Butterfly House at the Johnson County Fair. You can send a list of your item(s) to Mike & Carolyn, Butterfly House chairs, at candmmurphy@aol.com.

From A Gardener's Bookshelf

BY DOUG GERAETS



Good Husbandry: Growing Food, Love, and Family on Essex Farm
By Kristin Kimball

I happened upon this book on the new book shelf at the ICPL about two years ago. It was a pleasure to read and I thought worth doing a book

review for the *Thymes* but I've only now gotten to it.

So what exactly is "husbandry"? The *Oxford English* dictionary lists two definitions: 1) the care, cultivation, and breeding of crops and animals, and 2) management and conservation of resources. Certainly after reading this book you will appreciate that it is fittingly titled!

Strictly speaking this is not a book with a primary focus on gardening but instead on making a life farming as our grandparents and those before them might have. This book is really a follow-up or sequel to Kristin Kimball's first offering *The Dirty Life: A Memoir of Farming, Food, and Love*.

Good Husbandry chronicles the experience of a young family: Kristin, partner Mark and their two children living on a 500-acre farm in upstate New York. It is the ups and downs and daily challenges of a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) providing food for 250 people.

Throughout this book Kristin shares a story of creating a life on an agriculturally diverse farm (providing meat, eggs, dairy, vegetables, fruits, herbs, grains, pantry staples, fresh flowers and more). Highlighted are the challenges: the unpredictable weather, personal injuries and financial pressures facing a young family. Can this type of farm succeed and provide for their members?



As summarized on the inside cover of the book: "Featuring some of the local characters and cherished animals first introduced in *The Dirty Life*, plus a colorful cast of aspiring farmers who work at



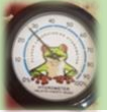
the Kimballs' farm to acquire the skills they need to start businesses of their own. *Good Husbandry* is about friends and

neighbors, love and marriage, births and deaths, growth and abundance."

Prior to CSA farming, Kimball worked as a freelance writer, writing teacher and assistant to a literary agent in New York City. This background shows as her writing is exceptional and the book well edited. It is a thorough joy to read!

The work on Essex Farm continues today and you can read much more about the farm on their website: <https://essexfarmcsa.com>. There is a blog and an abundance of pictures from the farm and its activities also online!

Plants Add Humidity to Your Home



BY LINDA SCHREIBER

Iowa's winter conditions are troublesome—safety issues navigating the weather and roads outside and dealing with dry atmosphere inside our homes. Although humidifiers are an excellent way to increase the humidity in your home, there are other ways too. Adding plants can increase the humidity and complement your home's décor.

Plants release much of the moisture they consume. A study conducted by the Agricultural University of Norway showed grouping houseplants helps decrease the likelihood of dry skin, common colds and sore throats.



Water evaporating from potting soil, plus water lost through the plant foliage (transpiration), increases the humidity. You can place houseplants on trays or saucers containing pebbles and water, making sure the water level does not reach the bottoms of the pots. Water evaporating from the trays raises the humidity around the plants.

Your home's dry air creates a "pull" to bring water from the soil into the plant's roots through the stems and up to the leaves. Water evaporates from the leaves into the air through *stomata* (plant pores). The process called *transpiration* delivers water and

nutrients to the leaves and helps maintain constant moisture movement for plant health.

Nearly all plants add some humidity, but some plants are better humidifiers than others. Plants with large, broad leaves (think rainforest) provide greater humidity than those with needle-shaped or small, rounded leaves (like cacti and succulents). Large-leaf plants also absorb more light and carbon dioxide for photosynthesis and releasing oxygen. Desert plants typically have small leaves with minimal surface area to conserve water. A few plants are especially beneficial — orchids and succulents — which take in carbon dioxide during the day and release oxygen at night.

Three top plant tips, plus a bonus tip ...

1. Keep plants in their nursery pots to ensure proper drainage. Set the nursery pots in a decorative pot to add pizzazz to your home’s decor.
2. Set plants two to three feet from windows. Direct sunlight can scorch leaves.
3. Check plants moisture needs every week and use your finger or a moisture meter to determine if a plant *needs* water. Different soils in different environments can impact how quickly or slowly the soil dries out. Overwatering is the number one reason plants die.
4. Bonus tip: regularly clean your plant’s leaves using a microfiber cloth and water to help them breathe better.

Sources:

1. <https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/faq/air-our-home-extremely-dry-winter-should-i-mist-houseplants>
2. <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/houseplants/hpgen/houseplants-that-increase-humidity.htm>
3. <https://extension.sdstate.edu/four-benefits-houseplants>

WHERE IS YOUR COMPOST?

BY SHARON RUDE



I am a very diligent about putting yard waste, fruit and vegetable scraps, egg shells, tea and coffee grounds in my compost bin. I would not be surprised if neighborhood critters help themselves to any fresh additions to the compost bin.

On December 9, I looked out a window and saw something orange on a maple tree branch next to the compost bin. I never anticipated I would find a mini-pumpkin up in the tree.

Was something trying to hide or protect its special treasure? Was it a squirrel, owl, raccoon, or opossum? That mystery will never be solved, but it was an interesting surprise!

 MG Birthdays 	
February 2022	
8	Constance Goeb
13	Carolyn Murphy
14	Li-Hsein Lin
16	Jeffrey Smith
28	Jeff Koepp

FLOWERS IN FEBRUARY

by Mary Lou Mayfield



Oh! How we miss our gardens during the frigid days of winter! Our house plants provide beautiful foliage, but how many provide flowers? Quite a few! I'll share with you the ones that thrive regardless of my "benign neglect," along with links to expert information.



South-facing windowsill garden: red holiday cactus, red zonal geranium, pink amaryllis, pink holiday cactus, pink florist azalea

Some house plants are grown specifically for their blooms, like the Holiday Cactus (*Schlumbergera spp*) <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/5714> "Growing Holiday Cacti."

Zonal Geraniums, usually grown from seed or purchased as cuttings, will also bloom indoors in the winter. This fall, I brought in my Ivy geranium (*Pelargonium peltatum*), and put it in a south-facing window. It still has a few buds left! I'm hoping it will do well under grow lights, and bloom outdoors again next summer. If not, I'll try starting my own cuttings. <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/5726>

Amaryllis can be purchased before the holidays, and sometimes on clearance afterward. The bulbs in wax coatings are decorative, but probably not rebloom-able, even if you could get the wax off (difficult, I tried). Without water, they can't store energy for future growth. The wax isn't biodegradable, either. I enjoy the blooms in the winter, put them in a shady bed during the summer, and store them in my basement until they sprout again. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/news/yard-and-garden-growing-amaryllis>

Some plants that we associate with early spring can also be grown as house plants. Azaleas & Primroses, sold as houseplants, will rebloom if we treat them well. <https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/2012/1-11/floristplants.html>

Florist azaleas need to stay inside in the winter, and can spend the summer in bright shade. If you buy a pot with several different colors, the plants will compete for resources and not do as well as one plant, alone. The hardest to save are the braided ones! The fact sheet referenced as a resource says that florist azaleas need to be chilled before they will bloom, and mine do fine on a chilly windowsill. They are very sensitive to too much or too little watering, but will let you know when they are thirsty

by wilting a little. And yes, being a perennial shrub, they will drop the oldest leaves.

<https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/ornamental/shrubs/azalea/growing-azalea-houseplants.html>

Common Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) can survive our Iowa winters. I first discovered them at a New Jersey garden show in late February, and planted them to bloom again. I've had success in planting them here, on the Northeast corner of my house. I can usually find them at one of the local supermarkets while it's still cold outside. They are also sold as perennials in the summer, but they are usually sold as mixed colors and have finished blooming. Unless the plant is labeled, for a specific color, you won't know what it is until next spring. Mine bloom twice a year, starting in the winter as house plants, then again in the fall in the garden, before blooming again the next spring.

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/primula-vulgaris/>

Amaryllis is not the only bulb that blooms in the winter. If we plan ahead, we can purchase and chill spring bulbs so they can bloom indoors. I had a friend who blessed me with Daffodils after the ground was already freezing. A few weeks in a dark, cold garage, and they reacted like it was spring when I brought them indoors! <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/4715>

The garden centers sell Paperwhite Narcissus, which bloomed outdoors at Christmas when I was growing up in Georgia. They don't need to be chilled, but the roots still need a period of darkness before the will start growing. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/news/yard-and-garden-forcing-paperwhite-narcissus>

Every now and then, a "foliage" plant will surprise us, as my Corn Plant *Dracaena* did, when my basement was filled with its fragrance! I have it year-round in a cool basement with a 12-hour light cycle. It could also spend the summer outdoors in the shade, but then it might not bloom.

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/dracaena-fragrans/>

I was delighted when my Pincushion cactus produced a corona of magenta flowers! It grows in the same southern window with the "windowsill garden."

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/mammillaria/>

A few plants, like the Forsythia and Pussy Willow, are still in the yard, with buds awaiting the first thaw of spring – if the buds haven't been eaten by deer or killed by the subzero temps! The trick is to cut branches from them as soon as we get a break from freezing temperatures, and bring them inside. This year, I also plan to try Crabapple and Redbud.

<https://extension.unh.edu/blog/2018/02/forcing-branches-indoors>

*NOTE: Some of these plants are toxic to house pets. My cats leave them alone, but if you have a pet that chews on leaves, you might want to avoid these plants or place them in a space where the pet cannot get at them: amaryllis, daffodils, narcissus, azalea, *dracaena*, and *Primula*.



corn plant *dracaena*



common primrose
(*Primula vulgaris*)



pincushion cactus

HortLine Quiz: November 2021

BY MARY STARRY

Fall bulbs, moving plants indoors, and houseplants became common topics as Iowa moved into the winter season. Here are five quiz questions from topics the Johnson County Master Gardener's HortLine addressed during the month of November 2021. What would your response have been to these questions? Choose your answers and then compare them to the responses provided by the HortLine volunteers, provided below the quiz.

1. If properly mulched, can Southern Splendour Cabbage Grass live through an Iowa winter?

- A. Yes
- B. No



2. What plant genus does this houseplant belong to?

- A. Agave
- B. Bromeliad
- C. Calathea
- D. Dracaena



3. Which type of peach tree would be most successfully grown in central Iowa?

- A. Coronet
- B. Elberta
- C. Newhaven
- D. Reliance

4. How long does it take for an Amaryllis bulb to grow and bloom when potted?

- A. 2 weeks
- B. 4 to 5 weeks
- C. 6 to 8 weeks
- D. 10 to 12 weeks



5. Which of the following bulbs can be planted under a walnut tree?

- A. Fritillaria
- B. Narcissus
- C. Peony
- D. Tulips



Now ... here are the answers, as researched by the HortLine volunteers. If you have a suggestion or different information regarding any of these, please let us know, so we can all learn from each other!

1. **Answer is B.** The Southern Splendour cabbage grass or tree is a Zone 9 to 11 plant. The best way to keep it alive over the winter in Iowa is to move it indoors.
2. **Answer is C.** The genus Calathea contains over 300 species, many of which are familiar houseplants, including the Zebra Plant, Peacock Plant, Rattlesnake Plant, and Rose Painted.
3. **Answer is D.** While Reliance may grow in central Iowa, it will likely bear fruit only every 3 to 4 years and have a life span of only 8 to 10 years.
<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/news/yard-and-garden-fruit-trees>
4. **Answer is C.** When properly planted, it will take 6 to 8 weeks for your amaryllis bulb to bloom. <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/12597>
5. **Answer is D.** A lot of bulbs are tolerant of the juglone produced by walnut trees, including tulips, bluebells, daffodils, snowdrops, and trilliums. For a complete list see <https://extension.psu.edu/landscaping-and-gardening-around-walnuts-and-other-juglone-producing-plants>

MG Upcoming Events/Volunteer Opportunities

*****Check organization website for cancellations prior to event date.*****

February 2022

100 Grannies

<http://www.100grannies.org>

Tuesday, Feb. 1, 5 to 7 P.M.

PLASTIC WASTE REDUCTION; Zoom. Thousands of community volunteers are collecting data along the Mississippi River to increase our understanding of the state of plastic pollution. This data is being generated through a ‘citizen science’ approach using a free mobile app for tracking litter called the Marine Debris Tracker and will be used to help policy makers, businesses, and citizens take action to reduce plastic pollution. Jennifer Wendt, MRCTI’s Plastic Waste Reduction Campaign Manager, will discuss the approach and next steps for the Mississippi River Plastic Pollution Initiative, and summarize the data collected in October in the Quad Cities. Register for this event at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcoduGpqTIsH9fD6ssFCjEteY09ZHZ41w6m>.

Monday, Feb. 21, 4 to 5 P.M.

GOOD NEIGHBOR COMMITTEE MEETING; Zoom or at Iowa City Public Library. Monthly Meeting for Good Neighbor Committee, held every third Monday of the month.

Eastern Iowa Bird Watchers/IC Birds

<http://www.iowacitybirdclub.org/events>

Saturday, Feb. 5, 9:30 A.M. to 12:30 P.M.

BALD EAGLE WATCH; Samuel L. Kirkwood Bald Eagle Watch: at the Coralville roller dam walkway next to Iowa River Power Restaurant. The ICBC will provide spotting scopes and help attendees spot eagles and other wildlife.

Sunday, Feb. 6, 1 to 3 P.M.

FREEZE FEST; Terry Trueblood Recreation Area. A family-friendly outdoor exploration event that includes games, winter hiking, survival skill building, crafts, and bird watching. And weather permitting, snowshoeing and ice fishing. Marshmallow roasting and hot chocolate will be available. The ICBC will staff spotting scopes for attendees.

Sunday, Feb. 13, 8 A.M. to 3 P.M.

FIELD TRIP: Quad Cities and Mississippi River. Quad Cities and Mississippi River for gulls, waterfowl, and other birds on the Mississippi River. We'll stop at locks and dams, riverside parks, and other hotspots like Fairmount Cemetery for winter finches. Walking is usually short-distance from frequent stops. We'll stop for lunch at a nearby restaurant. Return time is mid-afternoon. Dress for cold and wind, and bring a spotting scope if you have one. Meet leader Chris Caster at the Hy-Vee parking lot, 1125 N Dodge St., Iowa City. Carpooling is optional and only for those vaccinated for COVID.

Thursday, Feb. 17, 6:45 to 8:45 P.M.

BIRD CLUB MEETING. Zoom. Member Mark Brown will present "Wildlife of Pawnee National Grasslands." This landscape on the Eastern Plains of Colorado is home to many shortgrass prairie specialties. Mark visited the area in 2021.

Johnson County Conservation

<http://www.johnson-county.com/conservation>

<https://www.facebook.com/pg/johnsoncountyconservation/events/>

JOHNSON COUNTY CONSERVATION HAS MANY PROGRAMS SCHEDULED THROUGH FEBRUARY:

- Saturday, Feb. 5, 9 A.M. to 12 P.M. Outdoor Skills Series – Tying Flies. Join JCCB naturalist, Corridor Outdoor Adventure and Iowa DNR as we learn from an expert in fly tying.
- Saturday, Feb. 5, 3 to 5 P.M. F.I.N.D. LGBTQ+ Member Event Brainstorm Fireside Session. Members of the LGBTQ + community and their friends and family meet together to discuss ideas and interests for upcoming events for spring, summer, and fall 2022.
- Saturday, Feb. 12, 9:30 A.M. to 12 P.M. Nature Journaling Workshop. Learn the basics of nature journaling and spend time journaling through optional indoor and outdoor prompts.
- Tuesday, Feb. 15, 6:30 to 9 P.M. Woodworking for Wildlife: Bat House. Show bats some love by building a house for them! Fee: \$20.
- Thursday, Feb. 17, 6 to 8:45 P.M. Luminary Night Hike. Experience hiking under starlight on this 1.5-mile luminary-lit hike.
- Saturday, Feb. 19, 9 to 11 A.M. Making Maple Syrup. Learn all about making your own maple syrup during this hands-on program.

- Tuesday, Feb. 22, 10 A.M. to 12 P.M. Naturalist Hike. Learn about edible plants and mushrooms on a hike at Cedar River Crossing.

Learn more about each program and register at

<https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Johnson/Events.aspx>.

Linn County-ISU Extension

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/linn/>

Tuesdays, 6:30 to 7:30 P.M.

FREE LINN COUNTY MASTER GARDENER LIBRARY TALKS 2022. Hiawatha Public Library, 150 W. Willman St., Hiawatha.

- Feb. 1: Living with Bambi by Karla McGrail LCMG
- Feb. 8: Micro Prairie Gardening by Linda Hinzman LCMG
- Feb. 15: Outstanding Trees for the Midwest Home Garden by Mike Anderson LCMG
- Feb. 22: Raised Beds and Square Foot Gardening by Deb Walser LCMG

Thursdays, 6:30 to 7:30 P.M.

FREE LINN COUNTY MASTER GARDENER LIBRARY TALKS 2022. Lowe Park Arts & Entertainment Center 4500 N. 10th St., Marion.

- Feb. 3: What's Wrong with my Tree? By Mike Anderson LCMG
- Feb. 10: Rain Gardens by Karla McGrail LCMG
- Feb. 17: Seed Starting! By Karie Pohl LCMG
- Feb. 24: Successful Hanging Baskets and Containers by Deb Walser LCMG

Find more details about the Tuesday and Thursday Library Talks at

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/linn/free-linn-county-master-gardener-library-talks-2022>.

Saturday, Feb. 19, 8 A.M. to 3:45 P.M.

WINTER GARDENING FAIR 2022. Kirkwood Linn County Regional Center, 1770 Boyson Road, Hiawatha, Iowa. The Winter Gardening Fair 2022 is a day-long event with more than 70 gardening classes and hands-on workshops. Tuition covers your choice of five sessions, horticultural-related society displays and vendors, a lunch, and complimentary beverages. Cost: \$59. Learn more and register at <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/linn/winter-gardening-fair-2022-0>.

Project GREEN

<http://www.projectgreen.org/> and <https://www.facebook.com/www.projectgreen.org>

Sunday, Feb. 13, 2 TO 4 P.M.

SECOND SUNDAY 2022 WINTER GARDEN FORUMS: Garden FundamentalsZoom. Benjamin Vogt of Lincoln, Nebr., will address The Fundamentals of Garden Layers. His information is timely as we struggle to modify our gardens for increased summer heat, cycles of drought and excessive rain events. He will discuss what he's learned from natural plant communities to increase ecosystem function and climate resilience in our gardens at home. From the fundamentals of plant succession to using plant reproduction and growth habits to fill ecological niches, the right native plant communities make all the difference to create beautiful gardens that wildlife and people crave. Register at <https://www.icpl.org/events/40103/virtual-2nd-sunday-garden-forum-fundamentals-garden-layers>.

Additional Resources/Event Opportunities

Backyard Abundance

<http://backyardabundance.org/events>

Bur Oak Land Trust

<https://www.facebook.com/BurOakLandTrust/events>

Iowa State Extension

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/calendar/>

Johnson County-ISU Extension

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/johnson/>

New Pioneer Coop

<https://www.newpi.coop/community>

Seed Savers

<https://www.seedsavers.org/events>

Trees Forever

<https://www.treesforever.org/events/>



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Mail can be sent to:

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