



Johnson County Master Gardener

THYMES

June 2020

MG Steering Committee Meeting

Wednesday, June 10, 7 P.M.; virtual meeting via Webex will continue for the near future. 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 July issue by **Friday, June 26**.

Approved Projects Update



Downtown City Gardens

Volunteers have planted cannas, sweet potato ivy and a sprinkling of coleus and salvia in gardens surrounding Old Capitol Parking Garage. The Secret Gardens have been cleaned and weeded. The Dottie Ray Garden on Melrose Avenue has been replanted with dogwoods, dahlias, spider lilies, rudbeckia, allysm and begonias. In partnership with Iowa City Downtown District, MG volunteers planted Karl Forester grasses on N. Linn St. and added a donation of heliotrope and ageratum to Market St. The regular workday is Sunday from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Reminders are emailed each

week to notify volunteers where to meet, as well as, work tasks to be accomplished. Weather delays are also sent to volunteers. Contact project leader at lnschreiber@gmail.com.

Demonstration Garden

The Demonstration Garden is doing well, thanks to the help of Co-Leader Ann Ruppenkamp, Doug Geraets, Linda Schreiber, Janice Hining, Laura Bonifaze, and former MG, Kasey Jorgenson. Thank you all who have signed up to help with the garden, it looks promising!

You may notice we are utilizing every space available. We will be having work sessions on Tuesdays from 9:30 to 11:30 A.M. If you are unable to come at that time, please let Ann or me know and we will have some early evening sessions.

We have planted cannas, tomatoes, beans, beets, swiss chard, amaranth, spinach, kale, okra, cabbage and butternut squash. Zucchini, peppers, acorn squash, cherry tomatoes be planted soon. We also plan to mulch heavily to control weeds.

For more information contact project leaders: Sharon Jeter, 319-631-2148, sharonjeter@gmail.com and Ann Ruppenkamp, 319-389-4817, abo147@msn.com.

Fairgrounds Flower Beds

Due to rain and cold weather, clean-up in our flower beds got a late May 21 start. We maintain several flower beds spread out on the Fairgrounds where MG can earn volunteer hours. Contact a co-leader to see the beds and you can work individually or in small groups. We ask that you

bring your own gardening equipment (gloves, rake, or whatever you think you will need).

Work sessions are Tuesday evenings and Thursday mornings at 10 A.M. You can work any other day or time that is more convenient for you just let one of us co leaders know so we know where you've worked to avoid duplication of efforts. The JC Fair won't have entertainment this year but the 4-H kids will still be able to have their projects and animals judged. Plus there are other events held at the fairgrounds so we want to keep everything looking good. Contact co-leaders: Barb Krug, 319-431-5865, kbjkrug@yahoo.com or Joan Dinnel, 319-338-2434, jdinel@aol.com.

Raptor Center

We were notified of a management change at the Raptor Center this spring which was promptly followed by the University closing the facility due to the coronavirus. To date, we have not met with the new management. Going forward, Ann Tvelde will assume the leadership role for the gardens and Alice Linhart will serve as Co-Leader. Contact information: Project leader Ann Tvelde, 319-354-8561, ann-l-tvedte@uiowa.edu; co-leader Alice Linhart, 319-621-8073, mikeandalice@southslope.net

Butterfly House

As many of you already know, the Johnson County Fair exhibits will be reformatted due to the coronavirus. We are turning our focus to 2021. Contact Carolyn & Mike Murphy at candmmurphy@aol.com or 319-541-7079 for more information.

Plum Grove

We've not received an official notice when Plum Grove grounds will open to the public—the tentative date was June 1. Send questions regarding Plum Grove to Lavon Yeggy (lavon47@lcom.net),

Darlene Clausen (clausendarlene7@gmail.com), or Carolyn Murphy (candmmurphy@aol.com).

Gardens: The gardens are being tended to following guidelines of social distancing. The leader of each garden is contacting people who have expressed interest or have indicated interest on SignUpGenius. If you have not been contacted and would like to help, send a message to the appropriate leaders (Wildflower Garden, Lavon Yeggy; Grandma's Flower Garden, Carolyn Murphy; Friendly's Vegetable Garden, Darlene Clausen). Produce from the vegetable garden will be donated to the local food banks.

Taste of the Heritage Garden has been canceled for July 2020. We will turn our focus to 2021 to plan the 25th annual celebration. If you are interested in helping with the planning of this celebration, contact Darlene Clausen, Beth Fisher or Carolyn Murphy.

Taste of Heirloom Tomatoes has been canceled for August 2020. Anyone growing tomatoes for the tasting please enjoy them yourself or consider donating to local food banks.

Speakers Bureau

Opportunities for MGs to address groups have been suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. If you have ideas for a future talk when restrictions have been lifted, please contact Jackie Wellborn at jkwelborn@gmail.com.

Seed Share 2020 Update

Seed Share 2020 in-person offering, originally scheduled at the end of March, was suspended when Iowans were urged to shelter-at-home due to the coronavirus epidemic. Instead of canceling the annual activity, MGs moved to an inaugural online offering. A news article about the activity was accidentally posted to a national board—requests flooded in. After determining only those in our area

could be served, notices were sent to out-of-state requests along with suggestions about contacting their local MGs or state agricultural college or university for assistance. The Seed Share goal: inspire gardening and encourage donations to area food pantries to serve those who are food insecure. The Seed Share Facebook response: Reach-9,909; engagement-1,943; comments-288; shares-76; and responded to 485 emails. Lessons learned: post inventory to webpage ONLY (social media can't accommodate a pdf), local distribution ONLY, pick-up ONLY.

My Cactus Graft Mystery

BY JAYNE RYDER

Watering my plants this winter, something strange caught my eye. A small part of my Easter cactus, about 1/3-inch in length, had a bunch of tiny thorns poking out of it. It appeared to be a volunteer graft from my dog tail cactus, but how? The plants had a gap of over two feet separating them.



The Easter cactus hosting the volunteer dog tail cactus graft (circled). Since researching this article the volunteer dog tail cactus graft has a segment of Easter cactus growing out the top.

I pulled out my phone and searched for terms like “volunteer,” “graft,” and “cactus riding shotgun.” I looked up all their various forms and synonyms. I straight up asked my voice assistant “why

does a cactus grow on another cactus?” who provided no relevant results. There were zero articles about what my plants did in their free time.

To solve this mystery, I'd have to do some serious research on the science of cacti and grafting.

Cacti are even tougher than I thought. Native to the Americas, they can live hundreds of years in the wild – and they've been a crucial part of American cultures for much longer than that.

Since antiquity, people have eaten certain cacti and their fruits. They can be cooked, eaten raw, candied, and preserved, such as in jams or fruit leathers. Their sap is used to make medicine, while their spines can be used to make household items like sewing needles, combs, toothpicks, etc.

To this day, people cultivate the *Opuntia coccinellifera* for the insect that lives inside it. The Aztecs did it first, thousands of years ago, harvesting the insects and crushing them to produce rich dyes—the male's scales a crimson tint while the females' brilliant purple—used to color fabrics, cosmetics, and paints throughout the world.

All cacti are succulents, but not all succulents are cacti. You can tell the difference between a succulent and a true cactus based on its blossom's structure. A cactus will also have areoles; those are the bumps that sprout spines, flowers, and new branches – that last bit will be important in a minute.

What the plants have in common is their ability to store water. This is how they are able to thrive in dry environments. It also makes them useful sources of life-saving water in places where drought is common.

Most cacti either love lots of sun or lots of shade. They're usually happy to grow in a potting medium that's equal parts coarse sand, peat, and perlite. A vertical cactus needs its container to have a diameter that measures at least half of the plants' height. For a round plant, make sure the container offers at least two inches of space all the way around the cactus.

The trickiest thing about cacti is that they don't give you many signs they're in need of water. A cactus won't wilt the way most other plants do, so you have to look to the soil to keep track of how

much water your cactus needs. If you stick your finger in the soil just past your first knuckle, you should feel moisture. If the soil is dry, your cactus needs a drink.

You might only have to water your cactus once a month during the winter, when all it really needs is enough moisture to prevent the roots from drying out. Summertime growth requires more water, so be sure to check the soil every few days. Just never let your pots stand in water!

Once you feel like you've got the hang of this cactus thing, you can start more plants with the branches that grow out of those areoles we learned about earlier. Remove one of these branches using a clean, sharp cutting tool. Sometimes the branches fall off themselves. Either way, let the branch(es) sit in a warm, dry place – with the cut edge exposed to the air – for up to two weeks. The exposed wound should be completely healed over before planting in a sandy medium. The larger the cut edge, the longer it will take to dry completely and develop that “scab”.

If you don't allow the cutting to dry completely, it leaves your cactus susceptible to fungal soft rot; this condition is kind of like gangrene for plants, where the organic tissue decays until the new cactus becomes just a wad of jellied slime.

Take further preventative measures against fungal soft rot by treating the cut end with sulfur before placing it in its rooting medium (i.e. planting). Once placed, do not water the cutting right away. After another week, water the new plant sparingly. The cactus is built to survive periods of drought; it's better to err on the side of caution when your new plant is just getting established to avoid overwhelming this scorch-loving flora.

There's another way to propagate your cacti: grafting. In grafting terminology, the “scion” is the cutting that is to be grafted, while the “stock” or “rootstock” is the plant that will receive the graft. In other words, the stock remains planted in the ground while the scion is attached to it.

A successful graft depends on the health and stability of both plants. To perform a graft yourself, you'll also need a clean, sharp grafting knife, as well as some sort of string or twine to hold the two

pieces in place while they heal. And, of course, you'll want a pair of leather gardening gloves so you can handle these spiky plants.

When it comes to actually making the graft, the simplest method is called the lateral graft. This is where you use your grafting knife to cut the head off the rootstock, leaving at least 2-3 inches still in the soil. Then, remove your scion so it's about the same diameter as where you cut the rootstock.

Now comes the tricky part. Plants have veins and arteries just like animals do; they just carry water with nutrients instead of blood with nutrients. The veins in the scion need to match up to the veins in the rootstock. Otherwise, the scion will receive no sustenance, and it will die.

To make sure the veins match, look at the cut edges of both the scion and the rootstock. On each, you will see a dotted ring. Make sure these rings come together as closely as possible when attaching the scion to the rootstock. It's more important for these rings to match than it is for the outer edges to align – though the closer they do, the better.

Finally, secure the graft by wrapping the twine or even some rubber bands around the entire plant. Some gardeners use toothpicks to keep the parts together, but this increases the risk of infection during the healing process. At this point, leave your beloved Frankenstein alone for a couple of weeks. Once the two parts have fully joined into one plant, care for it just as you would any other cactus.

Here's one more important thing about grafting: the more closely related the two cacti are, the more likely the graft is to hold. In other words, plants of the same species are pretty easy to graft successfully, while a cactus of one genus is unlikely to bond permanently to a cactus of another genus.

No, cacti aren't racist. Not as a rule, anyway. It's just that different kinds have different nutritional needs. For example, my Easter cactus (*Schlumbergera gaertneri*) is native to the subtropical rainforest on the southeastern coast of Brazil. Like its more popular siblings, the Thanksgiving and Christmas cacti, it's a joined, spine-free cactus with flattened segments that bud in the fall. The Easter cactus' scarlet flowers, however, don't

actually blossom until the following year, after it’s enjoyed about 12 weeks of cooler-to-cold weather.

Meanwhile, the dog tail cactus (*Selenicereus testudo*) blooms in mid-summer, with large, white flowers that produce spiny, purple fruits. This plant is found on the northern end of South America and up into Mexico, typically at elevations anywhere from 150 feet to nearly a mile above sea level. They’re not all that picky about their environment, flourishing in tropical dry and wet environments.

The dog tail also has painful spines, and long segments that thicken with age. All it really has in common with the Easter cactus is that it can be epiphytic, meaning it can grow on tree bark.

What does this mean for our cactus mystery? Well, the dog tail seems to be a pretty resilient plant. My dog tail in particular is robust and healthy, with long arms that stretch outside its pot. My hypothesis is that one of those arms dropped into the Easter cactus’ pot at some point. The dog tail, being an opportunist survivor, naturally left one of its segments behind to spread its genome beyond its own soil.



A healthy dog tail cactus sits two feet away from the Easter Cactus.

It’s not much of a leap, but it still leaves many unanswered questions. What are the odds the cactus would graft itself instead of growing roots into the soil? And how did the graft take with no way to get nutrition from the other rootstock?

Master gardeners, have you seen or heard of this particular phenomenon? If you think you’ve solved the cactus mystery, drop a line to the *Thymes* Newsletter.

references: <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/databases/cactus/growingcactus/> www.sublimesucculents.com/how-to-graft-cacti/ www.uaex.edu/yard-garden/resource-library/plant-week/easter-cactus-4-28-06.aspx

MG Birthdays

June 2020

1

4

5

6

9

21.....

24.....

26.....

27.....

Jane Balvanz

Megan Garrels

Elaine Martin

Mary Hensley

Craig Wilbanks

Charles Mills

Vicki Siefers

Katy Carlson

Patricia Quiles

How to Get Rid of Moles

BY JOEL WELLS



Moles are a continual problem in my yard and they can be very frustrating. I have attached a link to an eight page document that explains fully the mole, its habits, and different control methods. While there are many products advertised for getting rid of moles such as devices, pills, and scare tactics that will not work the one tactic that will work and is most effective is trapping. Search your yard for the raised-up portions of the mole run that is the longest and straightest. Moles use these to get to different feeding locations, so it is the best place to set a trap.

- 1.) One of the most used traps is the bayonet or harpoon trap shown below. I marked the run with paint so that it is easily visible to monitor.
- 2.) Next, dig out the run the size of the trap with the openings exposed.
- 3.) Replace the soil packing it firmly where the trigger pan will rest



- 4.) The trap is placed so the trigger pan is firmly against the packed soil and set the catch. The trap should be sprung several times to ensure the bayonets fully pierce the run.
- 5.) The rest of the moles runway should not be stepped on or disturbed. The trap should be monitored and if the trap fails to catch a mole after 2 days then either the trap was improperly set, or the mole has changed its habits.
- 6.) The trap is sprung.



- 7.) The eastern mole (*Scalopus aquaticus*) is the most common and the only type of mole I have caught.

- 8.) The trap is ready to be used again. Since moles are solitary creatures there usually are only one or two at any one time.



The following is a resource from University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This is a PDF that can be downloaded and printed. The Handbook: Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage Wildlife Damage Management. 1-1-1994
MOLES By: F. Robert Henderson, Extension Specialist, Animal Damage Control, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66506-160

http://agri.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/agrinvgov/Content/Protection/Resource_Protection/Moles.pdf

***Editors comments: Like Joel, I've had experience over the years with trying to eliminate moles. The bayonet trap is no longer my preferred trap—I found it took too much time to set up and difficult to use. There are four or five other traps on the market and I currently prefer and use the Wire Tek EasySet Mole Eliminator trap (pictured right); available at farm stores like Theisens (\$29.99) . It is easy to set up and has been effective. As Joel notes above the most important factor is to identify the longest & straightest mole run—this signifies it as an active run and will provide the highest likelihood of success in trapping a mole.



MG Upcoming Events/Volunteer Opportunities

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

June 2020

Backyard Abundance

<http://backyardabundance.org/events>

Fridays, June 5 and June 19

10:30 to 11:30 A.M. Garden Guru at the Edible Classroom. Facebook Live Video. Enjoy your lunch with a virtual visit to the Edible Classroom.

- June 5: Wellness in the Garden
- June 19: Wellness in the Garden

Visit the Edible Classroom at Robert A. Lee Community Center after each event to see what was done, pick up free publications, tend the garden and harvest food. Please make sure to follow social distancing and hygiene guidelines. Link to event details:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/316138866021331/>.

Saturday, June 6

5 to 7 P.M. Walking in Mindfulness. Starrs Cave Park Rd, Burlington, IA 52601. Treat yourself to a walk in the woods. The event is free. Participants of all mobility levels are welcome and will be accommodated during this slow stroll. To celebrate National Trails Day, we invite you to walk through the woods in a slow, relaxed way that helps still your mind, enjoy the present moment, recharge and reduce stress. Playful, exploratory activities will deepen your relationship with nature to enhance personal wellness while simultaneously benefiting the health of the woodlands. Register at <https://events.eventzilla.net/e/walking-in-mindfulness-2138781750>.

Sundays, June 7 and June 21

3 to 4 P.M. Garden Guru at Wetherby Park Edible Forest. Facebook Live Video. Join us (virtually) at this mature edible forest for the following sessions:

- June 7: Inviting Wildlife Into the Garden
- June 21: Healing with Tea from the Garden

Visit the Wetherby Park Edible Forest after each event to see what was done, pick up free publications, tend the garden and harvest food. Please follow social distancing and hygiene guidelines to keep yourself and your community safe. Event link:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/279428103057345/>.

Wednesdays, June 10 and June 24

4:30 to 5:30 P.M. Garden Guru at Creekside Park Edible Forest. Facebook Live Video. Learn about Iowa City's newest edible forest in a virtual format.

- June 10: Herbal Friends and Flowers Planting
- June 24: Build a Sundial

Visit Creekside Park Edible Forest after each event to see what was done, pick-up free publications, tend the garden and harvest food. Please follow social distancing and hygiene guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Link to event details:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/963068434142476/>.

Bur Oak Land Trust

www.buroaklandtrust.org/events/

Saturday, June 6

10 A.M. to 12 P.M. Spring Family Day. Virtual event. Enjoy outdoor activities for kids of all ages, experiencing the sights and sounds of creek life, learning about different prairie trees, plants, and finding answers to your nature questions! Get details at

<https://www.facebook.com/events/2816837851701216/> or

<https://www.buroaklandtrust.org/events/family-day-at-turkey-creek-nature-preserve/>.

Johnson County Conservation

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

salgreen@co.johnson.ia.us

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

Thursday, June 25

9 A.M. to 3 P.M. Hawkeye CWMA Invasive Species Field Day. Schwab-Burford Acquisition 4045 245th St., Solon, IA. This workshop will cover a variety of invasive species issues in prairie, woodland, and wetland habitats. There will also be sessions on identification and control methods. The workshop is open to land management/conservation professionals as well as private land owners and the general public interested in learning more. Many of the sessions will take place outdoors. Participants should dress in outdoor appropriate attire and be prepared for hiking both on and off trail. Registration is required and lunch provided for all registered participants. To register, email bfreidhof@co.johnson.ia.us. Provide your name, phone number, and # of attendees in your email. For questions and for special accommodation requests, call Brad at 319-645-2315.

Project GREEN

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

Saturday, June 27 and Sunday, June 28

Times TBA. Open Gardens Weekend. Project GREEN invites you to attend our widely anticipated Open Gardens event:

1. visit a wide selection of Iowa City gardens
2. for absolutely FREE, no tickets necessary
3. raise money to make our community more beautiful while enjoying the event!

The money raised comes from local business sponsorship, and your attendance makes it a bigger event, attracting more sponsors. Find joy and inspiration in gardens ranging from tiny plant-filled patios to impressive landscapes – some never opened to the public before! For more information or to get involved, visit <https://projectgreen.org/open-gardens-weekend-2/>.

Trees Forever

<http://www.treesforever.org/Events>

Thursday, June 11

11 A.M. That Tree's Mark Hirsch. Webinar. A lonely Bur oak tree has fans from around the world

after Midwest photographer Mark Hirsch documented a year of the trees life in his popular book “That Tree.” Join us to hear the inspiring story behind what drew Mark to this tree and how people from all over the world seek comfort “beneath” its virtual branches. Visit website for registration details.

Tuesday, June 16

6 P.M. Stewards of the Beautiful Land Webinar. Why are Iowa’s native plants important and how can we bring Iowa’s landscape to life with pollinator habitat? Find out more in our four-class series. Due to COVID-19, the first class will be held as a webinar. Programs will be at Clayton County, City of Dubuque, Grundy County, and Mills County. Learn more and register at <http://www.treesforever.org/stewards>.

Friday, June 19

10 A.M. Creating a Backyard Buzz. What can you plant in your backyard to create pollinator habitat? Trees Forever helps answer this question in a webinar aimed at homeowners. Not everyone has a few acres to dedicate to pollinator habitat, but “islands” of habitat throughout our communities are vital for a sustainable future. Find out you can help. Registration coming soon. Visit website for details.

Additional Resources/Event Opportunities

100 Grannies

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

Eastern Iowa Bird Watchers/IC Birds

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

Iowa State Extension

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

Johnson County-ISU Extension

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

Linn County-ISU Extension

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

New Pioneer Coop

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

Seed Savers

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



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