

JOHNSON COUNTY IOWA MASTER GARDENERS

Johnson County Master Gardener Project Leader Annual Report



Name of Project: 1876 Coralville Schoolhouse

Name(s) of Project Leader(s): Karen Martinek

Provide a brief statement of the involvement/impact for the project:

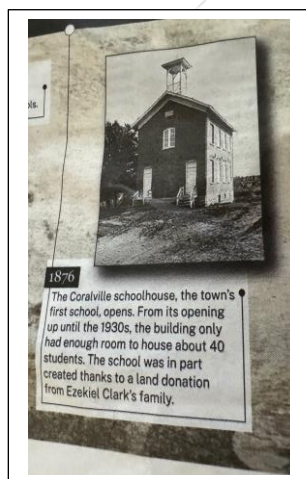
The gardens and green space surrounding the Historic Schoolhouse provide a pleasant setting for the continuation of history and culture preserved by the museum. The master gardeners continue to seek information on the previous plantings near the school house and use old fashioned perennials as a basis for any new designs and plantings. We continue to identify plants in the gardens. The City of Coralville mows the grass, the Johnson County Historical Society is responsible for the building and the Johnson County Master Gardeners maintain the flower beds and the foundation plantings.

Number and names of Master Gardeners Involved:

There were 9 names originally on the email list notified of work days and site goals and objectives. I was only aware of 5 regular volunteers, including myself, that attended work days and participated in any work independently. Those additional members were Bonnie, Janlyn, Sarah and Gail. We each had on average 2 work sessions per month from April through November, however, in May and June we each worked on average at least once or twice a week for mulching and watering. This totaled at least 80 visits.

Please include a description of project impact:

This summer the City of Coralville celebrated their 150th anniversary. Channel 9 News featured the Schoolhouse on the evening news. Although they did not specifically mention the gardens, our gardens did showcase the schoolhouse to provide a beautiful setting for the schoolhouse museum and the city's celebrations and tourism surrounding the anniversary. This year's celebrations also included the 4th of July and an overnight for Ragbrai, the Iowa Bike Ride. As you can see from the original schoolhouse picture in the newspaper and a more recent picture, the gardens have added a pleasant atmosphere for the museum. The landscaping of the area provides a nice green space for the neighborhood.



The Schoolhouse is located in a residential neighborhood with many apartment complexes and condos and also nearby small businesses. There is plenty of walking traffic in the area. Many residents walk their dogs through the school's green space. There is a lovely park bench in the pollinator garden, where many people take a lunch break or sit to make a phone call. Often residents stop by to thank us for taking good care of their neighborhood. The flowers provide a great area for pollinators and birds and a variety of other wildlife. This land is also adjacent to a walking and biking trail that follows the stormwater retention pond along Biscuit Creek. This brings bikers and joggers to the area.

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)).

As a new coordinator, I contacted the Coralville Parks, Nick Houg, to discuss the City's part or responsibility in the Schoolhouse project. He conveyed his support of the master gardener's work and agreed to help out as needed. Our MG team met early in April to evaluate the gardens and plan for improvements.

We set the following goals:

1. Remove the turf or grass between the shrubs on the sides of the school building,
2. Remove the grasses and weeds grown out of control behind the schoolhouse.
3. Plant new perennials in open spaces in the pollinator garden on the West side of the building. We decided to wait until after the MG plant sale to see if we could acquire any new plantings to add to our gardens.
4. Replant some Lily of the Valley in the front of the schoolhouse in shady spots.
5. Continue weeding to remove thistles and other weeds.
4. Identify unknown plants or weeds to decide what to keep, move or pull.
6. Ask Coralville Parks if they would repair the broken trellis near the front door and repaint it
7. Ask the Coralville parks for mulch and mulch all areas.

After a few work sessions we added a few additional goals:

1. When we realized it was a huge job, we asked Coralville Parks if they had special equipment to remove the turf.
2. Dug and replanted the lilyturf Liriope plants now growing underneath the shrubs on the sides of the schoolhouse.
5. Divided and moved some of the Hosta plants from the east gardens that get burned from the hot summer sun in that location. We waited until late fall to divide and relocate some of the Hostas to the back of the schoolhouse.
3. Planted some zinnia seeds around the crab apple tree near the front sidewalk and in an empty spot in the east garden for splashes of color.

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

Coralville Parks removed the grass on the sides of the building and sprayed the overgrowth behind the schoolhouse. After it was cleared, they mulched the entire back of the schoolhouse only leaving the evergreen shrubs. It looked amazing! They brought us several loads of mulch and we were able to lightly mulch all of the gardens. Not only did this look very nice, but it also helped keep the weeds down and the moisture in during this very dry summer. It was lots of work, but well worth it.

Coralville Parks also fixed and painted the trellis near the front doors.
We moved the lilyturfs and mulched between the shrubs on the sides of the building.

We planted a few perennials to the west pollinator garden and a few on the east side and planted Zinnia seeds for a splash of color.

We all spent some time identifying weeds/plants, weeded, especially the thistles, and mulched all. This really kept the thistles under control better than usual. There were fewer and fewer as the summer went on. We will see in the Spring if we have made progress.

We contacted community partners:

Johnson County Historical Society- In the fall we met Jaci Falco, the Education and Outreach Coordinator. Some volunteers witnessed a school class touring the Historical Schoolhouse and playing some old-fashioned outdoor games. We asked if our MG team could have a tour of the building to see old pictures, etc. Jaci Falco and the Executive director, Alexandra McKendree spoke to us about the Coralville Schoolhouse and responsibilities of the Historical Society and the City of Coralville. We invited the new MG graduates that signed up to work at the Schoolhouse to attend. Six or so new interns also attended. It was great to meet them and give them some information on the Schoolhouse and the gardens. Johnson County agreed to hold another tour in the Spring so additional members could attend.

Coralville Parks Department- It was great to meet, Nick Hough, from the Parks Department and work with them throughout the summer. We will have to reconnect with the City of Coralville again in the Spring to make sure we still have the proper contact.

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

The Johnson County Historical Society has asked if we would be interested in presenting a program along with them on the pollinator garden in the spring or early summer. We plan to have a special project to identify and map all our plantings for use by the Historical Society and all our Master Gardeners in preparation for this presentation. It will be a great project to get started on this Spring.

Now that grasses and turf has been removed and the trellis repaired, we can plant Morning glory and Zinnia seeds or additional perennials earlier next Spring to avoid so many early watering sessions and planting in the heat of the summer.

The decorative grasses are becoming too large and need to be thinned and cut back this year.

I would also love for a few more master gardeners to participate in the care of the Schoolhouse Gardens to help cut down the hours spent in the garden by each volunteer and help water in case we have another dry summer.

Karen Martinek, Project Leader
December 27, 2023