

# Germinator

Vol. 30, No. 6 Editors: Julie Stark/Kathy Hughes

June 2020

## LINN COUNTY MASTER GARDENER EVENTS

### ***Steering Committee Meeting\****

Extension Office  
June 2 • 6:30 pm

### ***Extension Council Meeting\****

Extension Office  
June 8 • 5:00 pm

### ***Executive Committee Meeting\****

Extension Office  
June 22 • 3:00 pm

\* Meetings held via Webex—email Jean Wilson if you wish login information (jtwilson@iastate.edu)

### ***Garden Walk Group Work Mtg***

Lowe Park  
June 6 • 8:00 am

## The 2020 Charlene Woeste VIRTUAL Plant Sale

*By Karen Woeste and Phil Pfister, Co-Chairs*

Over the years, the plant sale has encountered some interesting challenges, such as late spring, snow, cold, winds, and rain to name a few.



*Master Gardeners maintaining required 6' social distancing while working the plant sale.*

This year the COVID-19 pandemic presented an obstacle like none encountered before. The sale typically takes place from 8:00 a.m. to noon on a Saturday morning, with the

*Continued Page 2*

### **What's Inside...**

- Virtual Plant Sale Recap—Pages 1-4
- Things We Love: From Iowa to Florida-Florida to Iowa—Pages 5-6
- Outreach Gardens—Pages 7-8
- Plans Continue for Garden Walk—Page 9
- Coordinator Comments—Page 10
- Steering Committee Report—Pages 11-12

Continued from Page 1

majority of plants being sold within the first one to two hours. That means lots of people close together. Following the COVID-19 guidelines, that wouldn't work this year, so we explored having a virtual plant sale.

Thanks to many Master Gardener Volunteers, our Master Gardener Coordinator, and the ISU programming and order administration teams, we were able to pull off a very successful virtual plant sale. ISU developed the program, handled ordering, payment, and communication with the customers regarding the order process, availability of product, etc.

During a normal sale, Master Gardeners pot up plants and bring them to the plant sale location on the Friday before the sale. The plants are then groomed (if necessary), priced and moved to the point of sale. The virtual sale added a lot more to the process. It started with the need for catalogs to show the products we had for sale. To build the catalogs, MG's donating plants were asked to identify the plants and determine how many they would have to sell. This had to be completed about three weeks before the actual sale so ISU could develop the program and test the process.

That in itself was a challenge because in mid-April, many perennials were still dormant or just starting to show. It also meant many of the plants being grown at the Lowe Park Greenhouse had to be potted up and photographed. One corner of the greenhouse became a dedicated photo studio.

ISU's program kept track of the number of plants available and deducted the available for sale number as plants were sold. Keeping the inventory accurate was an ongoing challenge, as not all plants seemed to want to cooperate (some died, hosted bugs, etc.). Stated here, this process seems pretty straight forward, but it took a lot of hours to make the system as accurate as possible, test the program, write descriptions for everything, and keep track of it all.



*MG's Larry Edwards, Linda Hayward, Coleen Kint, Sandy Fiegen, Becky Ray filling customer orders for vegetables, flowers and arrangements grown at the Lowe Park Greenhouse.*



*Sue Fletcher, Linda Hayward and Maurine Tannery filling greenhouse orders.*

Continued Page 3

Continued from Page 2

The sale started on Friday, 8 May, at 8:00 a.m. Not unlike the physical sale, there was a rush at the opening bell. Ninety buyers signed in the system in the first 15 minutes. That almost brought the system to its knees, but our support team made it work. There were some glitches, but considering the timeline for the program to be developed and that this was a first-time event for all of us, it went amazingly well. The sale closed on Thursday, 14 May at 4:00 p.m.

Customer order pickup started Monday, 18 May at 2:30 p.m. When customers placed an order, they were offered times to pick up their purchases. Times available were between 2:30 and 8:00 p.m., Tuesday through Thursday, at Lowe Park, in Marion. Pickup sites were divided into 5 locations based on the first letter of the last name.

In preparation for the day's customer order pickup, the perennials, which were staged at a MG's home, were gathered by customer, then moved to a tent at Lowe Park where the orders were consolidated with plants from the Lowe Park Greenhouse. This sounds like an easy process, but it turned out to be one of the greatest challenges. Adding to the challenge was the weather. It either rained or drizzled most of Monday, and stayed overcast, windy and cold all the rest of the week. It was a good thing we had the tent to provide protection of the plants while they were queued up for pickup. However, with the help of a lot of dedicated volunteers, we were able to fill the customer orders with a minimal number of issues.

So, overall, how do we feel about a virtual plant sale? Talking with a number of customers, they liked it. Several said they liked not having to deal with the crowds, and being able to shop in the comfort of their home, and being able to go back to shop again. From the Master Gardener, and Master Gardener



*Dyan Anderson and Brenda Garbe unloading perennial orders to merge with greenhouse orders for customer pickup. Orders were queued in the tent at Lowe Park.*



*Some plants in queue in the tent, waiting to be moved to the customer pickup area.*

Continued Page 4

Coordinator standpoint, the virtual sale is a lot more work, requires earlier planning and commitment, and volunteer involvement over a longer period of time. If life is back to "normal" next year, should a virtual sale be considered or should we return to the traditional sale? A survey is being developed so we have input from the customers and Master Gardeners. Hopefully it will be a decision we can make based on input from everyone, not driven by a pandemic.

Our thanks to the Marion Parks Department for making Lowe Park available to us during the customer order pickup days. Thanks also to Culligan of Marion for the donation of a water dispenser and drinking water during the customer pickup days. Thanks for the 44 Master Gardener volunteers who worked on all aspects of the plant sale to make this first ever event a success.

Thanks to the Linn County Extension and Outreach staff for all their support, and a major thanks to Jean Wilson, our Master Gardener Coordinator, for everything she did to coordinate and support the programming, catalogs, approval by the Linn County Health Department, ISU, and everything else that went into the virtual plant sale from conception to finish.



*A wagon filled with plants waiting for a happy customer to pick them up.*

# Things We Love: From Iowa to Florida – From Florida to Iowa

By Becki Lynch

Hi Fellow LCMG's! Becki Lynch here – most of you know I'm now living in Florida, and Kathy and Julie asked if I would write an overview of what it's like to garden down here – kind of a comparison. I was happy to, but soon learned (for those who know me) that an overview was going to take a book, not an article! And so I thought I would write a short piece on one aspect of gardening – of course, about pollinators – and ask YOU if you are interested in hearing more in the future. Just let Julie or Kathy know, and they'll pass it along to me – and no hurt feelings, if not.



*Front of our bungalow—taken one morning (sorry no sun)*

Let's start with the star pollinator plant – the milkweed. First, don't be fooled by online charts about Zones – they informed me that our "Bread and Butter" milkweed, Common or *Asclepias syriaca*, ranges from 4a to 9b – NO! Brought some seeds down in January, they germinated, lived for about a month, but when the temps went up, they went DOWN.



*Three tropical milkweed blooming*



*Tropical milkweed with coreopsis, zinnias and lantana.*

No one here grows it and it's nowhere. The staple here is Swamp Milkweed, *A. incarnata* and *A. perennis*. *A. tuberosa* (Butterfly milkweed) is also well established and is easier to grow than in Iowa. The *A. perennis* is a native not seen or grown in Iowa. It is a shorter bushy plant growing to about 2 feet. Summer flowerheads are small with white to light-pink

*Continued Page 6*

flowers. Bright green leaves are lance-shaped. It prefers moist to wet soil conditions and can adapt to shady locations. As you can see from the photos, I have mine in a nursery set-up to monitor their growth – light and water levels – closely. In the picture there are 3 cultivars of swamp and 2 of tuberosa – I just received them as bare roots 2 weeks ago – everything grows FAST!

The Tropical Milkweed is just the same as used in Iowa – Ace Hardware has them here for \$3.99 in a gallon pot – cool! I got both the red/gold and pure gold. You can see from the pictures that my first plants already have pods and are completing their growth cycle. One could cut them back and regrow, but I will be pulling them as the pods burst. Hopefully, I will have some natural reseeding, and I will be receiving new plants at the end of May. Don't want to risk OE for the Monarchs.



*Six Swamp milkweed plants.*



*Two Butterfly milkweed plants.*

I've joined the Native Plant Society, but only attended one meeting before everything was shut down. However, their online webinars are very informative and helpful as I learn about pollinators and plants in the sunny south.

Well, that's it for now – hope you and yours stay safe and healthy. So glad to see your photos and the activities in Iowa as I am missing those beautiful spring bloomers – both human and plant. It's hard to tell one season from another down here, although I'm finding that the plants all do!

Take care -- Becki

# Community Outreach Gardens Spring Start 2020

By Beula Dvorak

This has been a crazy spring indeed with the coronavirus impacting our entire lives and the wet cool weather experienced for much of March-April-May. Needless to say, the community gardens have also had a slow start, but wanted to give everyone some kind of update on what is happening in our project.

**Tanager Place** has built new raised beds to replace old ones. They will likely be limited in what programming they can do this year due to being a residential facility. They would like large planters they can put some flowers in. I am going to reach out to some farmers I know to see if they can donate feed barrels that the kids can paint. If anyone has big barrels or planters that can donate, Tanager Place would appreciate them. They are receiving plants from the green house.

**Catherine McAuley Center** will continue to build on last year's efforts to increase access to community gardening plots for refugees and immigrant clients. They will continue with community gardening programming for their residential housing program. It is unclear how much face-to-face interaction master gardeners will have as the residential facility is high risk. They are receiving plants from the green house.

The **Marion Community Garden** is again this year being led by a community volunteer. She has lettuce, spinach, radishes, onions, carrots and beets up, as well as several different Cole crops planted. The garden is off to a great start.

We moved the garden from the ordinal location late last fall. This move is also a great opportunity to expand the garden. The new location provides an opportunity for the garden to grow in size and features. Designing the new garden layout also provided an opportunity to expand the planning team. We partnered with Iowa Big, Marion Water Management Engineering, Be Well Marion, the lead Marion Community Garden volunteer, and a science teacher from Marion Vernon Middle School. The Vernon Middle School also donated a 9 x 12 greenhouse, which has been located on the community garden site.

Plans are currently underway to build 6 double high additional raised beds, add trellises, a picnic table, and two HCA beds. The garden received a \$1,000 grant from the Growing Together Iowa 2020 Mini Grant, and \$5,000 from an Alliant Energy grant. In addition to adding more gardening space, we are looking at ADA approved pathways for access to the HCA raised beds.

**Southeast Linn Community Center** (photo right) has planted most of their plot by the Lisbon Rehabilitation Center. An increase in the number of volunteers assisting with the garden will enable watering and weeding tasks to continue to be done in a timely manner.



## **Lowe Park Donation Garden**

will be planted soon under the leadership of Mark Goodsmith. He would love to have an assistant to help water and maintain the garden beds through the summer.

*Continued Page 8*

**Mt. Vernon Wellness Center**

(photo right) The 12 raised beds at the Mt. Vernon Wellness Center have been constructed but are not filled with soil yet. We are anxiously waiting to get some planting completed here before it gets too late in the season. It is still unknown whether or not any kind of summer kids programming will be held.



**Hiawatha Elementary School** I was able to add compost to the beds and Charlie will be getting us mulch to add around the beds. I have volunteers from the school (teachers and families) each taking a garden bed to plant and care for over the summer. We would like to use the produce for the School Pantry. Families are receiving "drive by" food boxes each Friday and we could add fresh produce to those boxes when it is available.

**Old McDonalds Farm** is home to 8 new raised beds constructed in the lower level of the garden space thanks to Farm Director Megan Lopata. Planting has been completed. Megan is without summer staff so more of the work depends upon her. No MG summer gardening programming will occur.

**Dept. of Corrections** has determined not to plant any of the gardens this season due to the restrictions of the Coronavirus situation.

**Olivet Gardens** are being planted and some plans are underway to provide some kind of garden programs with some children.

**Wellington Heights Neighborhood Gardens** are in the process of being planted under the guidance of Nadine Bonegraeber as Tommi has been kept busy with other duties related to the Coronavirus situation.

I wait to hear from HACAP if there are any different guidelines for donating produce for the food pantries this year. Any Master Gardener is invited to again participate in our CONNECT GROW SHARE A ROW project. Just plant an extra row designated for donation to HACAP. Or you can make the commitment to donate produce from your usual garden space. Fresh produce will be especially important this season as our local food pantries have seen an increase in need for food because of the coronavirus situation. Although we don't have the mini grant as in past several years, we will continue to track the pounds of produce donated by Master Gardeners, our community garden partners, and local community partners. Together we can continue to make a difference.

To participate in the CONNECT GROW SHARE A ROW project or to get involved with assisting at any of the community gardens, please contact Beula Dvorak..... [bdvorak4@aol.com](mailto:bdvorak4@aol.com) or call 895-8206 to get connected. THANKS in advance.



# Plans Continue for the Lowe Park Garden Walk

*By Brenda Garbe*

This spring we're lucky to be able to work in most gardens earlier than last year. There are still some soggy areas that we're trying to remedy. Revamping of several areas and repair of some structures are taking place to freshen up the gardens in anticipation of the July 11<sup>th</sup> Garden Walk.

We've had some new faces come out and assist in the gardens in May and they're so much appreciated and we're hoping more will show. This is the easiest way to get some volunteer hours in, and your gardening therapy.

We still need some assistance in these areas: planting annuals, laying landscape stones, spreading mulch, weeding, or dividing perennials. A season long schedule to assist in watering is being organized, so please consider signing up to water once a week. We have all the sprinklers and hoses on site and will give instruction.

Group workdays are traditionally Tuesday and Thursday mornings 9AM and Thursday evenings 5PM, and if you can join us on either of those times, we welcome all. There is enough room to spread out and yet still engage with others across the garden.

Please mark **June 6<sup>th</sup>** at 8 AM to have a group workday focusing on the Herb Garden hardscape. We need help laying blocks and leveling a walking path, prior to planting.



## Coordinator Comments

*By: Jean Wilson*



As I write this, we're in the final hours of the plant sale. Moving it from an in-person sale to an online one was a huge task. It took hours of effort on the part of Phil Pfister, Karen Woeste, Beula Dvorak, and Wanda Ohrt, not to mention all the people at the greenhouse who helped write the catalogs, prepare the plants, and help organize it. Thank you to all!

We've had some glitches with people getting incomplete orders or missing their pickup times, but most customers have been very gracious about any problems we've encountered. We had over 230 orders so that's a lot of organizing and scheduling. ISU Event Services managed the financial side of it with taking orders and processing them and the folks there did a great job, especially considering the fact they had to do all their work remotely because the offices are closed.

I don't have the final sales figure, but as soon as I get that I will share it with you. This method of sale was far more labor-intensive than our other sales, and I doubt if we'd want to do this going forward. But going forward we may be forced to consider alternative methods of reaching our audience, not only for this sale but for all our events. That means we'll all have to be creative about our programming.

An example of this is School Gardens 101, the 3 days of workshop we have in June. We had to switch this to an online training class because of requirements with our partner (Grant Wood AEA). So I'm working with Sam Krumbholz and Deanna Thursby to get that 3-day module switched to online training. I need to brush up on my technology and we'll need to practice delivering to an audience we can't see in person.

I'm hoping the Garden Walk can proceed as planned, and we'll continue working on that until we hear otherwise. That will be on July 11 and we need all hands on deck to help prepare Lowe Park demo and perennial gardens for visitors. Please help if you can!

I expect distance learning may continue into the foreseeable future so we need to start thinking now about Winter Gardening Fair, our MG training, and library talks: how can we deliver content to our audience if we need to do it virtually? That is a topic that will occupy most of my time this summer. I'll have some learning to do myself to figure out how to help you do what you do!

The office will open to the public in a limited fashion on June 1. We'll limit how many people can gather in the common areas, ask that everyone wear masks, and we'll limit the Hort Line to 1 person per shift, not 2. Any guidelines will be posted so you'll know what to expect. I plan to work in the office most of the time, but may work from home one or two days a week, depending on my schedule. You can always contact me via email or call and leave a message -- I check my mail and phone regularly.

So now it's on to our "new normal" whatever that may be. Please stay safe and follow any guidelines you're given wherever you're volunteering. Enjoy your summer!

## **May 5, 2020— Steering Committee Meeting—DRAFT** (Remotely via Webex)

The meeting was called to order and roll called.

**Present:** Rose Blank, Lynne Brokaw, Diane Brooks, Randy Dusil, Tracy Hansen, Linda Hofmeister, Jan Knott, Cindy Lehman, Barb Neal, Jennifer Reed, Deb Walsler, Bev Whitmore and Diane Wiesenfeld. **Absent:** Julie Clemens. **Also Attending:** Beula Dvorak and Jean Wilson (MG Coordinator)

Minutes from the April 7, 2020 meeting were approved.

### **Discussion With Project Leaders**

Community Outreach Gardens(COG) – Beula reported on the program that was started in 2014 as a pilot program partnering with AmeriCorps and McAuley Center with the mission of providing education and support toward establishing and maintaining community gardens. Over the last 3 years the program has focused on donation gardens providing 31,000 pounds of produce to the community in 2019. The program has received grants from ISU in recent years and in 2019 achieved The ISU Search For Excellence Award. The current pandemic protocol will curtail some youth involvement and activities at some sites. To date some cold crops are in and they are awaiting installation of beds at the Lester Buresh Community Center in Mt. Vernon. Additional MG volunteer opportunities always exist and those interested may reach out to Beula.

### **Coordinator Report**

The Plant Sale arrangements are nearly complete with on-line ordering to go live this Friday into the following week. The site has been order tested and a dry run was performed at Lowe Park. Customer order pick up will start on Monday, May 18<sup>th</sup>. Volunteer assignments are due out this week. The event format and safety outlined have been reviewed by ISU and the Department of Health.

After completion of the Plant Sale, planning will begin for the Winter Gardening Fair. Brainstorming will be involved to discuss options and contingencies in the event pandemic related restrictions are still in place.

Training – 27 individuals have expressed interest and 10 have completed the process leading up to interviews. It is unknown if current restrictions will allow training this season or affect the normal format.

The Hortwriters project is in transition and Jean has been coordinating until the new Marketing position is filled with the Extension.

The volunteer experience we have been accustomed to may evolve to a new normal going forward pending Pandemic related restrictions.

### **New Business**

An attempt has been made to request updated project descriptions with mixed response. Any current descriptions that exist will be compiled. A future Steering Committee will review those that exist and develop any that may be missing.

Hortline is functioning with Paula Wilson monitoring phone and Jo Dillon monitoring email. Information is forwarded to Deb and correspondence is referred to the MG best equipped to respond. This seems to be going well

*Continued from Page 8*

albeit that responses may not be immediate. Call and e-mail inquiries have continued.

Jean was commended by the Committee for her hard work especially in these uncertain times and coordinating plant sale plans. All who assisted in that effort are also to be praised.

The Committee emphasized that current health guidelines with regard to masking and distancing need to be a new normal practice. In addition, no MG volunteer should feel obligated to perform in any environment or situation that they are fearful or uncomfortable with regard to personal health or safety.

### **Old Business**

It is assumed at this time that the Garden Walk will still take place at Lowe Park. Volunteer help will be needed at the demonstration and perennial gardens.

Next Steering Committee Meeting: Tuesday June 2, 2020, 6:30 pm via ZOOM

Next Executive Committee Meeting: Monday May 18, 2020, 3:00 pm via ZOOM

Respectfully Submitted,  
Randy Dusil

## **IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY** **Extension and Outreach**

Linn County Extension **Master Gardeners**  
383 Collins Road NE, Suite 201 • Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
ph (319) 377-9839 • Hortline (319) 447-0647



This institution is an equal opportunity provider. For the full non-discrimination statement or accommodation inquiries, go to [www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/ext](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/ext).