



The Green Thumb

Monthly News and Updates for Polk County Master Gardeners



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Message Regarding COVID-19

ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County is working to adhere to local, state and national recommendations to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Our priority is the

health and safety of our staff, volunteers and program participants. All in-person meetings have been postponed, cancelled or put online through May 31st. Staff are working remotely and practicing social distancing. The Polk County Extension office is also closed to the public until further notice. [Please view our website for updates.](#)

Regarding Master Gardener events and meetings, we are working to comply with the following recommendations from ISU Extension:

1. Meetings & Events

- a. All in-person meetings & events are to be cancelled through May 31st (with a possible extension)
- b. Individuals 65 and older should avoid contact with other people (CDC).
- c. You may want to host workshops and MG meetings online. Please work with your MG county coordinator to set this up.

2. Volunteer Projects

- a. As you consider whether to maintain a Master Gardener volunteer garden site, please consider the safety of the MG volunteers, Extension staff and the public. In some cases, some projects won't happen or will be scaled back this year. This is a good time to consider focusing on fewer projects that are done well.
- b. All projects must follow guidelines based on recommendations from the CDC:
 - i. Keep the number of volunteers working in the garden to a minimum (less than 10 people)
 - ii. Ensure social distancing and practice frequent hand-washing. Stay home if you are sick.
 - iii. Use approved cleaners for shared surfaces, such as tools, hose spigots, or hose handles.

As this situation is continuously unfolding, guidelines from Iowa State University, and ISU Extension and Outreach may be updated in the future.

As projects send communications about upcoming opportunities, a reminder that participating in Master Gardener volunteer opportunities is not obligatory at any time. **While some garden activities continue on a small scale, and within guidelines placed by our local health department, ISU, and ISU Extension, we recognize that you may not feel comfortable participating in any activity during the current situation, and that is accepted.** The health and safety of our volunteers and participants remains our highest priority during this time. If you have concerns or questions, please don't hesitate to contact Kalsa Parker Browning, the contact for the Polk County Master Gardener program at kparker@iastate.edu or 515-401-6068, or Paul Gibbins, executive director for Polk County Extension at pgibbins@iastate.edu or 515-229-9182.

Message from the Steering Committee Chair

Hope everyone is staying healthy and safe out there! I know that everyone is itching to get outside, and I can hardly blame you given the pandemic and social distancing requirements. As you start to contemplate your gardening activities, please follow the current COVID-19 guidelines posted from Iowa State University Extension. This month I had the pleasure of corresponding with Eva Henderson who had a been gardening all her life. You can hear her passion for gardening and life as you read her interview. Enjoy!



Christine: What first piqued your interest in gardening? And, how did you make your way to the Master Gardener program?

Eva: I was raised on a farm near Postville in NE Iowa. My mother had a large vegetable garden, apple trees, grapes, raspberries, rhubarb, and strawberries. We preserved our food from that so I was brought up very close to the land and the things that it provides. The flowers that we had mostly originated from starts shared by family and friends. Heirloom peonies, roses, iris and even the bridal wreath bushes came from starts from Grandma's farm.

I attended Iowa State University and earned a BS in Agronomy. I was particularly interested soil biology-the life within the soil. After college, I married my husband Mike and we had 3 daughters. Mike is from Texhoma, Ok in the far west end of the Oklahoma Panhandle. An environment that provides stark contrast to the hills and trees of NE Iowa. I was a stay at home mom as we raised our girls, so they grew up with me in the garden as well.

My trail to the Master Gardener program and my growth as a gardener has been interesting to say the least. My husband's career with the USDA has led our family to be more mobile than most. We have lived and gardened in Clayton County in NE Iowa, the Loess Hills in Harrison County, on the high plains in Grant County, KS, Delaware County in eastern IA, Cherokee County in NW IA and for the past year we have lived in Polk County north of Mitchellville.

I joined the Master Gardener program in Delaware County in 2009 because I wanted to be a part of the group that took care of the beautiful community gardens in Manchester. After I had completed the program, I helped to teach the next class of MG. In NW Iowa I was active through the county extension office with 4H, county conservation tours, presenting programs at the county Ag Day, and more. I joined the Polk County MG to continue my community work and to meet people with common interests. I connected with the Enabling Garden in Altoona through the extension office.

As we have moved, I have established gardens and landscaping everywhere that we have lived. Each time, there are a handful of heirloom flowers that I make sure

to move with us. The list of special plants that connect me to family and friends has grown along the way. I have fern peonies from my great grandmother, a wisteria started from a seed from my friend Lisa's vine, a purple and yellow iris from our friend Nancy, and many more.

Christine: Do you prefer Vegetables or Flowers (or neither!).

Eva: I love growing all things. Each has value in the ecosystem. I love growing our family's food, brightening the world with flowers, providing habitat for the birds with trees and shrubs. It's all so cool.

Vegetables and fruits often need insect pollinators. We can't just expect those pollinators to magically appear at the perfect time to do their job, so I incorporate flowers into the vegetable garden to attract, house and feed the pollinators all season long. Other flowers and plants can serve as habitat for desirable insects that eat the bad bugs. Some flowers such as marigolds can help to deter pests. It's all connected and it all starts with a healthy, living soil system. What is going on under the surface of the soil is everything to what grows on top of it. Take care of the soil first and it will take care of your plants.

We have bought acreages as we've moved that tend to need cleaning up and fixing up. That lets me be creative as I design and install plant materials and hardscapes. I look forward to the future as I plant windbreaks, orchards, shade trees, and flower beds envisioning what they will look like years down the road.

On our current acreage, we are working to establish a native short grass prairie pollinator habitat. That is a little different than a typical garden, but employs similar basic concepts of soil health, seed bed prep, seeding establishment, weed control, and project maintenance.

Christine: When you are in the garden, what brings a smile to your face?

Eva: Flowers add color to our world, and I have found that is something that I crave. I don't enjoy the dark dull browns of bare trees and dormant grass. I do progressive plans for any garden I design so that I have something blooming from the first early spring bulbs, through the heat of summer, right up to the last days of fall when the asters are in bloom through the first frosts.

I enjoy watching the progression of growth throughout the seasons. I walk our acreage in late winter looking for the first signs that the buds have begun to swell on the trees. I look for the first signs of spring bulbs to push through the soil in early spring. I look for the first seedlings to push up when I have started trays for garden transplants. Each morning I walk the yard and look for something that looks fresh and new.

Christine: What do you want others to take away from the Master Gardener Program?

Eva: I would hope that others simply find what connects them to the earth whether that is the beauty of a blooming flower or the taste of a fresh vegetable from their own garden. Once people find a connection and feel a part of something bigger, they usually have an interest in taking better care of our world as a whole.

I also think it is important to connect to the people who garden around you.

Gardeners are a friendly and generous group as a whole. They are willing to help each other learn and to share what they have grown with others around them.

Christine Barker
Steering Committee Chair



2020 Bus Trips

We are doing some positive thinking and hoping that we can go ahead with our one day bus trip to **Cedar Rapids on July 25th!** [The registration form is on the Polk County Master Gardener website.](#) We are excited to have a nice mix of private and public gardens for this trip - along with some great shopping opportunities! More details about the trip are included in the registration form. Please send in your form now to hold your spot on the bus!

Contact
Chair:
[Laurie Barrick](#)

Questions? Please contact [Laurie Barrick](#).



Downtown Farmers' Market

We are still on hold regarding the opening of the Downtown Des Moines Farmers' Market. Once the Market re-opens, we'll confirm our scheduled appearance dates and post a call for Master Gardener volunteers through Signup.com.

Contact
Co-Chairs:
[Matt Dore](#)
[Sherri Soich](#)
[Randy Campbell](#)

Demonstration Garden

May this find everyone safe and healthy.

One of the joys of spring is seeing new blooms and the fresh green of trees and plants leafing out. While taking the time to appreciate nature stay safe, stay healthy and keep a distance.

Our volunteers have been slowly completing spring clean up from a distance. Sod has been laid over the construction zone, the birdbath

Co-chairs:
[Ruth Doxon](#)
(515) 253-9115
[Sandie Sydnes](#)
(515) 276-1497

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fountain cleaned and turned on and most beds prepared for the season. Thank you for being responsible and working at a distance.

During the month of May the garden will start planting. Vegetables and flowers started from seed are coming along nicely and will be large enough to place in the ground when the weather indicates risk of frost has past (generally around Mothers Day). There will be a need for volunteers to assist in planting and also keeping moisture on our new transplants and maintaining weeds which always seem to be in season. Watch for communications from the co-chairs on tasks that may be completed on your own time.

As we start to gather in small groups for planting or special projects, please notify the co-chairs if you plan to participate. It is important for us to keep work groups of a limited size and align our tasks with social distancing. Your cooperation in not only protecting yourself but those around you and is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your flexibility.

When it comes to events, the Demo team is taking it week by week. No public events are scheduled for the month of May. We will monitor the situation to determine how June education programs will be handled.

We continue to look for volunteers to step into organizational and leadership roles. Tell us of your interests. We can meet at the garden (masks on) or discuss over the phone options available.

Enjoy the sunshine when you can (safely) and we do hope to greet you in the garden some time this season.



Contact:

Co-chairs:

[Dean Brand](#)

(515) 360-0774

[Joyce Carle](#)

(515) 229-6769

[Jean Roe](#)

Discovery Garden

A Hidden Gem

Hope this writing finds you all doing well and practicing your social distancing skills.

The pond has been cleaned and we had 40 fish survive the winter. Bed cleanup is also going well with most of them being done. **Please remember that if people want to work they need to contact Dean Brand at drbrand@mediacombb.net to get on the schedule because of the 10 person limit.**

We have ordered a new bench in honor of Marilyn Moon's mom and it will be arriving sometime, but we don't have a ship date yet.

(515) 205-8706
[Patrick Schmitt](#)
(515) 657-1937

[View our website](#)
[join our Facebook group.](#)

Thursday, August 13 through
Sunday, August 23, 2020
2020 Iowa State Fair

Enabling Garden

Due to the continued status of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have different requirements as we start to get our gardening activities going for 2020:

- To facilitate social distancing of a minimum of 6 foot and the gathering of a maximum of 10 people, we have expanded our organized work night offerings to three nights:
 - Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Approximately 4PM - 8PM.
 - Each day has a sign-up so that we can manage our total volunteers to 10 or less. (Contact Rosie if interested)
 - Please wear your name badge.
- Volunteers that would like to work during the daytime or on a weekend, please feel free to do so. If you notice the total of volunteers is nearing 10 people, please respect the rules set forth by the Governor to limit our gatherings to 10 people.
- We recommend that gardeners bring your own tools, garden gloves, etc. if you have them.
- For shared items, such as wheelbarrows, hoses, water hydrants, door handles etc. We have spray sanitizer in both sheds that should be used generously and frequently.
- Cloth face masks are encouraged but not required.
- Stay safe and healthy.

In light of the continued changes with public health and the potential for inclement weather, please ensure that you are checking our Facebook page for updates on these 2020 schedule events.

- **First work nights:** Mon. May 4th - Wed. May 6th - any time after 4:00PM in the Garden
- **Planting of Annuals:** Mon. May 11th - Wed. May 13th
- **Regular Work nights:** to continue weekly on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings until further notice.
- **Moved to AUGUST** - ~~May 19 (Tuesday)~~ - Speaker Mamta Israni to present on "Mother



Co-chairs:
[Rosie Surber](#)
[Judy Goshorn](#)
[Paul Satre](#)
[Christine Barker](#)

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connect with us on
our [Facebook Group](#).



Everyone hang in there. We hope that soon, that we will be back to our regular Tuesday work nights.

Thank you, volunteers for being generous with your time and expertise to keep the garden beautiful!

Program Committee

Chair: [Mary Poulter](#)



Be sure to save the date for the Harvest Celebration which will be held **Tuesday, Oct. 27th**. Marcia Leeper will provide her educational presentation, and we will also honor new Master Gardeners and awards recipients!

Continuing Education Opportunities

Looking for education opportunities you can do from home as you practice social distancing? Below are some options you can do right from your couch:

Check out the Iowa Master Gardener Youtube channel:

- [Give Your Garden Wings](#) - 1 hour
- [Gardening Season FAQ](#) - 1 hour
- [Ecology Plus Diversity](#) - 1 hour
- [Limited Space Gardening](#) - 1 hour
- [Managing Vegetable Pests](#) - 1 hour
- [Compost 101 and Growing Roses](#) - 1.75 hours
- [Local Bees and Organic Vegetables](#) - 1.75 hours
- [From Seed to Table](#) - 1.5 hours
- [Garden Helpers](#) - 1.25 hours
- [Food Security Partners](#) - 1.25 hours
- [Landscaping for Wildlife](#) - 1.25 hours
- [Gardening with Youth](#) - 1 hour
- [Urban Tree Selection](#) - 1.25 hours

NEW 2020 Winter Webcasts

[Iowa Weather](#)
[Bring Kids in the Garden](#)

Videos from OSU's Garden Ecology Lab:
[Dueling with Diggers: Moles, Voles, and Ground Squirrels](#)
[Mason Bees](#)
[Reading a Pesticide Label to Protect Bees](#)
[Adapting Dry Farming Techniques to Vegetable Gardens](#)
[Demystifying Grafted Tomatoes](#)

And **[MANY more!](#)**

Archived Webinars from [Iowa Learning Farms](#):

[February 5: Mike Naig, Iowa Secretary of Agriculture](#)
A Water Quality Chat

[March 18: Matt Russell](#)
Embracing the call to abundance, the value of environmental service on Iowa farms

[March 25: Mark Rasmussen](#)
Carbonate research and the potential for carbon storage in Iowa soils

[April 8: Liz Ripley & Mark Licht](#)
Succeeding with Cover Crops & No-Till: A Guide for Spring 2020

[April 15: Adam Janke](#)
Finding Mutual Opportunities for Soil, Water, and Wildlife

[April 22: Billy Beck](#)
Trees, Forests, and Forestry: Benefits to Water Quality and On-Farm Income

[April 17: Jerry Hatfield](#)
Why Improving the Soil Will Pay Dividends

[May 15: Emily Waring](#)
Cover Crop Impact on Crop Yield and Water Quality

[June 19: Chris Hay](#)
Drainage Water Recycling: An Emerging Conservation Drainage Practice

About

Polk County Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources programs aim to help all Iowans, from the home hobbyist to the ag professional, make informed decisions through research-based education. Some programs and focus areas include farm management education, technical expertise for crops, livestock and pests, as well as our Polk County Master Gardener volunteer program; our signature horticulture education program. Our work supports clean water and healthy habitats, profitable farms, and a more secure food system.



Contact

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