



# Digging It!

All the Dirt from the Allen County Master Gardeners  
January 2024

## *Notes from Nic*

I hope you all had a great Christmas and New Year. As we move into the new year, I am asking for your help. For university and federal reporting purposes that I am required to do each year, I am asking that whenever we hold a program or event, we ensure that a total number of participants is collected and reported to me shortly after the event. This would include even if you were asked to teach at an event by yourself. If you are unsure if number should be reported, I would rather you do so anyway. I do not need demographics of those in attendance. Just the total number. This will allow me to accurately report our impact in my reporting in December of each year. I will try to remember to ask for these numbers, but I am asking for your help as well.

As you also know, back in November, Issue 2 was passed which legalized the use of marijuana in the State of Ohio. The University, which includes you as Master Gardener Volunteers, is not permitted to engage in questions we receive from the public on the topic of marijuana. This is a mandate from The Ohio State University Office of Legal Affairs. Here is our official statement we are to use if we are asked about the topic: **“The Ohio State University cannot answer questions regarding marijuana as it remains a federally prohibited schedule 1 drug and the university is subject to the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act. Thank you”**. If you do get asked and they will not seem to let it go, please have them call the office and I will take it off your plate to deal with.

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding the above two topics.



## *Notes from Joanne*

I hope that this is finding everyone in good health. If you have not submitted your hours for 2023 or agreed to recertification either online or by emailing me, please do so immediately! You cannot be a MGV for 2024 unless you have recertified. We are down to just a few volunteers that have not completed. I am sending out

another email today, Monday, January 8<sup>th</sup> if you still need to complete. Please check your email. If you are having any type of issues, please call or email me.

Thank you very much to most of the volunteers who have already submitted all their paperwork.



## *Tidbits from Teresa*

*“Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt.”* John Muir

In January I tend to spend more time in the kitchen since it's too cold to be outdoors. I miss harvesting my fresh herbs, especially basil, which is cold intolerant. This herb has many attributes: enhancing flower beds, attracting pollinators, providing aromatherapy and its main use as a valuable cooking asset.

There are four types of basil: sweet, small dwarf basils, purple leaved varieties and specially scented varieties. Sweet basils are the large leaved varieties like 'Genovese' and 'Napolitano'. It is a staple in Italian cooking, and they are the aromatic and pesto makers. They are slower to bolt and run from 16 to 24" tall and wide. Small leaved basils are dwarf plants generally under 12" x 12". These basils have notes of anise and cloves and are great in salads. They are well suited around your tomato plants or tucked in containers. Purple basils are less culinary than sweet basils but provide a long season of beauty. The purple basil fragrance has tones of lemon, lime or cinnamon. You can sow this variety like microgreens and eat the thinning's.

Basil can be tricky to grow and remain pest free and productive. The trick is to pick the right type and remember it cannot handle the cold. Basils come from warm climates so a brush with temperatures below 50 degrees will stunt their growth if not kill them. Once they are weakened, they are susceptible to pests and diseases and struggle all season long. If started in the greenhouse, wait until well after the frost date and pinch the central growth tip down to two sets of leaves when planting. This makes a stronger and sturdier plant. In Ohio the second week of June is best for planting outside.

Basil needs fertile well drained soil in a warm protected spot. It is not drought tolerant and dries easily in a windy spot. Along with location, spacing is an important consideration. Basils need air to circulate on all sides, avoid overhead watering and do rotate location to avoid diseases. Because they are somewhat fussy as to location, container grown plants are easier to accommodate and you can move them if they are not happy. Keep basil productive by removing the flowers at the bud stage. Blossoms deplete the plants energy which reduces leaf production. Harvest stems by counting down 2 to 3 leaf nodes and pinch off the center stem right above a set of leaves. Stand leaves in a glass of water until you are ready to use them.

There are cultivars resistant to fusarium wilt and downy mildew, the most common banes of basil, but good cultural practices are your best bet.

Enjoy what beauty January has to offer, use the leafless landscape to help you plan for next year and before you know it we will be out plucking weeds! May 2024 bring you and your family many blessings and much happiness.

Teresa Diehl  
January 2024

January 2024

Happy New Year! I found this quote by Josephine Nuese (an American writer) in my Farmer's Almanac calendar< January page:

“Anyone who thinks that gardening begins in the spring and ends in the fall is missing the best part of the whole year. For gardening begins in January, begins with the dream.”

May your dreams begin!!! Sandy Bindel

### *Greetings from Gretchen*

HAPPY 2024!

I hope this message finds you warm, safe, healthy and filled with peace and joy as you recover from the frivolity of the holiday season!

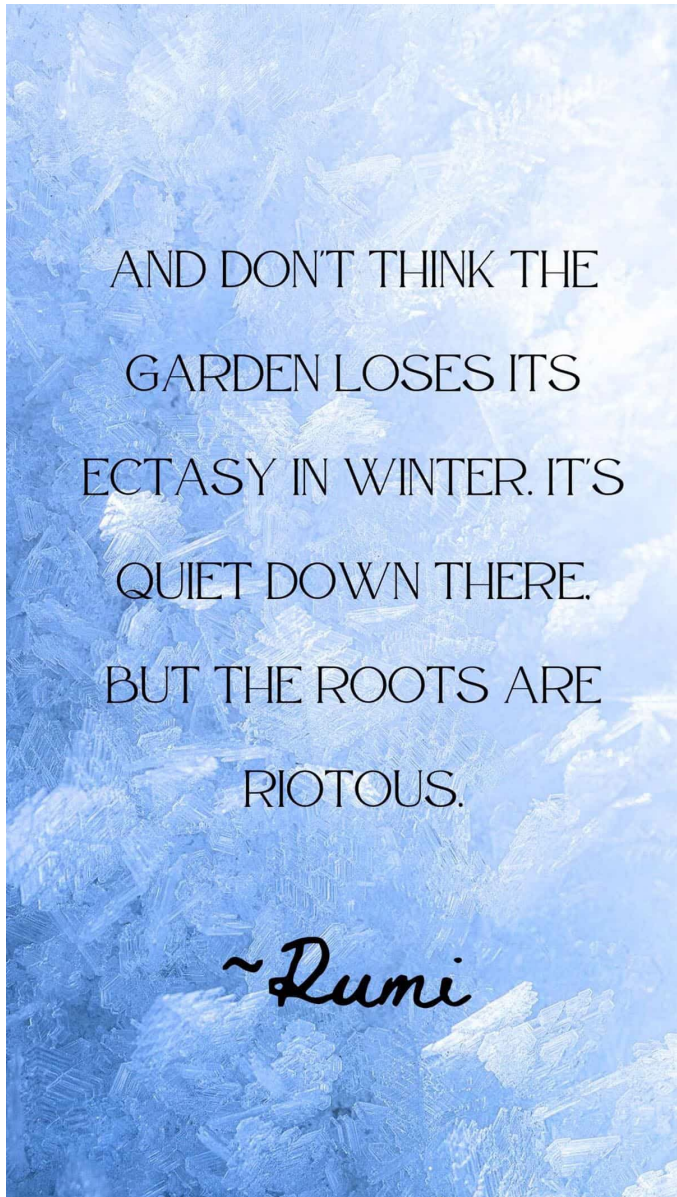
I, for one, am happy to see the return of snow and more seasonable temperatures. For all we've learned of phenology and the order of things, I still worry and wonder about how all of our favorite plants and garden friends are responding to the unusually warm and dry fall.

I am looking forward to seeing you all again this Spring, but in the meantime, enjoy this time of quiet and coziness to refresh and restore!

#### PACKING UP CHRISTMAS AND THINKING AHEAD

As I am “undecking” the halls, I have set aside a special tub in my storage area marked “CTF”. I have been taking a second look at holiday items that I no longer use and putting them into the tub for next year's Christmas Tree Festival. I have also been adding items from around the house as I begin my post-holiday organizational spree and purge. I feel good getting rid of some items that I know will be finding new homes and helping our bottom line next year. I hope you'll do the same!

I have also been finding a few bargains in the clearance bins at the craft aisles of my favorite stores. I am keeping an eye out for picks and artificial berries; wired ribbon; etc. for next years Gifts of the Earth booth. If you get a chance to find a few treasures, we will greatly appreciate it! Thanks again for all your help and support for this new project!



AND DON'T THINK THE  
GARDEN LOSES ITS  
ECTASY IN WINTER. IT'S  
QUIET DOWN THERE.  
BUT THE ROOTS ARE  
RIOTOUS.

~Dumi

#### ART OF GARDENING PLANS IN PROGRESS

I am working to finalize the speakers and agenda, hopefully this week! Keep an eye on your email this month for more information! We have some exciting speakers coming!

There are a lot of other details that go into making our seminar so special! I am happy to get your help and support with the following items:

- If you would like to shop/select/solicit for the 2 items for the big raffle items, I would like to have a volunteer for that. The budget for the 2 items is \$100 total. I am happy to provide more information about this, so if you are interested, please reach out to me!

- We have traditionally added a charming, small “favor” item to the folders. If you are crafty, scrappy, creative – and would like to make a proposal, please do! We generally limit the supply budget for these items to \$1 – so that is a tight budget for anything too elaborate.

- We will be reaching out to more of you to help collect door prizes in February and early March.

- And of course, we will be reaching out for your help to make our continental breakfast and snacks first class per usual! You know you rock!

~ Gretchen Staley, President



### *Happenings from Kay*

Jan 24

#### **Winter Wonders: Exploring Native Plants**

What does your winter garden look like? Many of our winter landscapes are *blah* and devoid of charm until the thaw of spring. (For example: a hosta garden which is now a bare piece of soil) But by choosing native plants that exhibit different traits your winter garden can transform a barren garden into a place of natural beauty.

Ohio boasts a rich biodiversity that extends beyond the warmer seasons. Native plants not only endure the winter months but also offer a tapestry of textures, colors, and forms that will highlight your winter garden.



These resilient species have adapted to Ohio's climate and soil conditions, making them excellent choices for sustainable and low maintenance landscapes. A few examples are:

**Eastern Red Cedar** (*Juniperus Virginiana*) *with its blue green foliage the Eastern Red Cedar stands out against a snowy backdrop, providing both color and shelter for wildlife*

**Winterberry** (*Ilex verticillata*) *known for its brilliant red berries, this deciduous holly species adds a pop of vibrant color to the winter landscape and serves as a vital food source for birds*

**Pussy Willow** (*Salix discolor*) *sporting fuzzy silver catkins in late winter, the Pussy Willow brings a touch of whimsy to the gardens and attracts early pollinators*

**Redtwig Dogwood** (*Cornus sericea*) *this shrub's bright red branches offer a striking contrast against the snow, creating a picturesque scene in the winter garden*

**Switchgrass** (*Panicum virgatum*) *while it's often appreciated for its ornamental grass characteristics in warmer months, switchgrass's upright form and golden hue add structure and interest to the winter landscapes.*

Integrating these native plants into your garden not only enhances its visual appeal but also supports local ecosystems by providing food and shelter for wildlife during harsh winter months. Consider planting in clusters or drifts to maximize their impact and maintain structure. Go Native, for your winter landscape!



## Volunteer Voices

*New! – This is new section will have guest articles from our volunteers about anything nature, gardening, or just something that you would like to share. If you are interested in sharing something, just email me your articles the last week of the month and I will be glad to add it. Looking forward to learning more from everyone. This month Sandy Bindel submitted an article about a wonder trip that she took.*

### Isle Royale National Park

More than 40 years ago I read an article about Isle Royale National Park in National Geographic Magazine. The article was on the subject of re-introducing wolves on the island and the wolves' role of interacting with moose. I was fascinated and immediately added this place to my mental "bucket list"!

I never forgot the article, and in 2022 my dream became a reality. It takes a fair amount of planning just to get there! Designated a National Park in 1940, it is made up of over 400 islands, the main one being 45 miles long by 9 miles wide at the widest point. Remotely located in the western end of Lake Michigan, it is one of the five least visited of our National Parks, but is the most re-visited one! Backpacking is a very popular activity and there are 36 designated wilderness campgrounds in the park. Because camping is no longer in my wheelhouse, we stayed at the lodge in Rock Harbor located on the north end of the main island. It has 60 rooms available from June until early September. In addition to the lodge and campsites, there are a few camper cabins located at the southern end of the main island in Ozaagaateng (formerly Windigo). The park is closed from November 1 through April 15.

Getting there was half the fun! My husband and I took a seaplane from Houghton, Michigan. Ferry service is available also from Houghton and Copper Harbor and Grand Portage, Minnesota. The island is a part of Michigan but is closer to Minnesota and Canada. The rooms in the lodge are nothing special and rather pricey so we planned just three nights staying there. All of the rooms have a view of the vast waters of Lake Superior just past Cranberry Island. We chose to take a tour to get to some of the attractions. We visited Edisen Fishery. Fishing and copper mining were two of the industries of the area in the past, as well as some logging and there had even been several resorts located on the island. We visited the Rock Harbor lighthouse and a moose study camp where there were displays of many moose antlers showing various stages in a moose's life

and even several moose spines! It's pretty much a guarantee that you will see at least one moose on the island. We saw several, one was a very large bull moose swimming from Cranberry Island to the main island. What a sight that was!

On another boat tour we hiked to Lookout Louise where we could see some islands of Canada. Especially interesting to me on this hike were the wildflowers we saw as we hiked through a place where wildfires had gone through just the year before. The wildflowers were out of season, but the first "restorers" of the area. When we were trying to decide what part of the summer to visit, I had called the ranger station to ask about wildflowers and also mosquitos and biting flies. The gal I talked to told me that June and July were best for the flowers, but the insect pests were also worst during those times. I deferred to my husband who is loved by mosquitos and made our plans for after the time when they are most active, thereby missing prime wildflower time. So, the unexpected sight of several different types of wildflowers was a real treat!

My favorite thing about our visit was eating thimbleberries that we found growing along the paths! They are similar in taste to and look like a flattened red raspberry. It was the end of the season for them, but I managed to find plenty of them to eat during our hikes. It's perfectly permissible to eat the blueberries and thimbleberries found growing there, even though it's a national park.

Our short visit was jam-packed with interesting things. One of the days we had thunderstorms, but we hiked anyway. We encountered two others hiking that afternoon. Both women, each hiking alone. Another unusual encounter we had was a visual sighting of a serpent-like creature we saw swimming in the channel outside our room. we could only view different parts of it at any given time but its "wake span" was about 8-10 feet. Cell service is spotty on the island so I couldn't google it until we got back to the mainland. We had asked several people about it, but no one had a clue as to what it might have been. My best research showed it was possibly a rare sighting of a lake sturgeon. It was something we will never forget!

Lastly, we did not bring any of our own food along on the trip. In Rock Harbor where we stayed there was a hiker store with dehydrated as well as other packaged food. We opted to have our meals at the Greenstone Restaurant which is open only during the time that the lodge is available. The food was varied and very good. They even had beer and wine options....until they ran out of alcoholic beverages the second day we were there! It was the end of the season, and they did not replenish their supply.

Our seaplane flight back to Houghton was a little crowded. The storms of the previous day had caused all transportation (seaplanes and ferries) to be cancelled. They had to increase the number of flights and overload some, making for a somewhat cramped 40-minute flight back to the mainland!

All in all, a very memorable trip! Unique on many levels!

-Contributed by Sandy Bindel