

bcsem

March 2015

POINTS OF INTEREST:

Our next Quarterly Meeting is being hosted by Mt. Clemens Thursday, March 19, 7 PM at the Mt. Clemens Library.

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED! BE THE HOST COMMUNITY FOR DECEMBER 2015 OR FOR ANY QUARTERLY IN 2016! WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU! CONTACT JAMES KEEHN AT 586-894-8562 TO VOLUNTEER TODAY!



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Beautification Council of Southeastern Michigan

The Magic of Seeds - by The National Garden Bureau Inc.

It's no surprise that Jack (of fairy tale fame) was traded "magic" seeds for his cow. By their very nature, seeds are magical. They've laid dormant, just waiting for the right conditions to come along so they can burst forth with entertaining growth and continue the fanfare to a summer-long display of flowers or vegetables.

Seeds let you start at the beginning. It's a satisfying, personal involvement that starts with your decision of which seeds to grow. Seed catalogs and seed packet displays offer you a much wider selection of flowers and vegetables than you will find among started plants. You get to choose exactly which plants you will end up with—size, shape, color and even the name you like. Seeds are inexpensive, so you can afford to "try something new" or go a little crazy and buy all your favorites. Seeds are as natural as you can get. You can watch their life cycle from beginning to end. Even if you aren't an aggressive recycler, seeds naturally lend themselves to being started in egg cartons or other throw-away containers that let you feel good about what you are doing. For most of us, seeds take only a little time each day to be cared for properly, fitting into even the most active schedules. They comprise the almost ideal hobby, needing little time, little money, and returning tremendous rewards in relaxation and satisfaction.

Decisions, Decisions...Perhaps the most difficult part of growing seeds is making the selections. If you are planning to grow vegetables you need to first decide what vegetables and then what varieties. A review of you and your family's likes and dislikes will probably narrow the list quickly. Choosing flowers requires a lot of decisions, but you can mix and match and choose from a wide range of options. You need to decide if you will be planting in full sun, partial sun, or shade. Soil conditions and knowing if the soil is moist or dry is also important.

Starting Indoors...Read the packet instructions on when to plant indoors. You want to start your seeds six to eight weeks before the final frost date in your area. The best containers for starting seeds are made of plastic or pressed fiber, peat strips and pots, and peat pellets of different types, as well as growing cubes or complete seed-starter kits. If you use your own containers, make sure they are thoroughly washed and are as sterile as possible. Drainage is important. Containers made for seed sowing will come with drainage holes. If you use recyclables like egg cartons or cans, be sure to punch drainage holes in the bottom. The best choice for germinating media is a sterile, soilless mixture available in garden centers. Although garden soil might seem like a good idea for starting seeds, it isn't.

Sowing Seeds...Dry growing mix is difficult to wet completely, so before filling your containers, put the mixture in a plastic bag and thoroughly wet it by kneading to your heart's content. Then fill your containers with the mix about one-quarter inch from the top and let them sit for awhile. Drain off any excess water. If you are using peat pots, water them thoroughly first, and then fill with the moist mix. Pat the moist mix down firmly, flattening it with a spoon or label. Nothing is perfect, and you will have to face the fact that not every seed will germinate. You might lose a plant or two when you transplant, so you will need to sow more seeds (double is a good bet) than you actually think you want. Large seeds can be easily handled and placed individually in the mix. Smaller seeds can be sown by snipping off a corner of a seed packet and tapping then gently out of the packet as you sow them. If too many seeds fall out at once, gently spread them with the tip of a pencil. Seeds need room to grow, so don't plant them too thickly. Place two large seeds and two to three small seeds in each container where you want at least one plant to grow.

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Message from the President by James Keehn

A new year typically brings about resolutions. Gardeners are no exception when wishing for better; better gardens, better planning, better record-keeping, etc. The following are five resolutions from the National Garden Bureau that we wish every gardener, no matter what their level of expertise, will embrace in 2015:

1. Try not to blame yourself for gardening failures. Fairly often Mother Nature is not our friend when it comes to gardening. Sometimes life gets in the way. Don't despair! Simply try again, and learn from experience. Your garden, and your gardening friends, are both extremely forgiving.
2. Don't be afraid to ask questions. How else can you learn? Take advantage of the experience of your neighbor, your friend, the garden center employee, or the local extension agent. If they are like typical garden fanatics, they will appreciate your interest and be flattered that you wanted to learn from them. And learn you will!
3. Try something new. This seems like a no-brainer, right? Find something exciting to plant or a garden project that's out of your comfort zone. You have to stretch your repertoire to grow. And what a sense of accomplishment!
4. Share your passion. Studies have shown that many of today's gardeners got their start by learning from someone else, usually a parent or grandparent. Can you be that mentor. Will you be the reason your son, daughter, or grandchildren serve homegrown vegetables to their families? Could you be the reason your neighbor plants flowers in their window box this year?
5. Embrace nature, and garden for the birds, the bees, the bats, and the butterflies. One of the most enjoyable benefits of having a garden is being able to see the beautiful creatures who visit it. Nature is so intricately balanced. Supporting natural habitats is a rewarding responsibility for all of us. Witnessing wildlife in action in our own backyards is priceless.

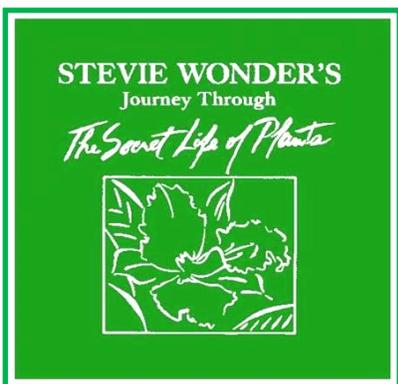
This year, take a moment to assess your time and talents. Make a list of things you want to do and learn and commit to accomplishing them. Whom can you share this new knowledge with? Whom can you mentor?

Pass it along my friends! Share the wonderful world of gardening and being a steward of the earth.

Have a great year!

Jim

The President's CD Pick—Journey Through The Secret Life of Plants



Stevie Wonder's "Journey Through the Secret Life of Plants" released by Motown on October 30, 1979, is the soundtrack to the documentary "The Secret Life of Plants" directed by Walon Green. It was based on the same book by authors Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird. Wonder created the film score by having Michael Braun, the film's producer, describe each visual image in detail while the sound engineer, Gary Olzabal, specified the length of passage. This information was processed to a four-track tape with the film's sound on one of the tracks leaving Wonder space to add his own musical accompaniment. He tries to convey the scientific findings from instruments that measure plants' response to stimuli, along with the breakthroughs of George Washington Carver. Wonder remarked in 2004 that the album "It was an experimental project with me scoring and doing other things I like, challenging myself with the things that entered my mind from the Venus's Flytrap to Earth's creation, to Coming Back as a Flower." Stevie Wonder's lyrics read as follows: "I can't believe the nucleus of all begins in a tiny seed, and what we think is insignificant provides the purest air we breath. But who am I to doubt or question the inevitable being. For these are but a few discoveries we find in the secret life of plants." If you haven't heard it, this is a unique and special musical and meaningful experience.

Are Last Year's Seed Still Viable? By Beth Clawson MSU Extension

It's a good time to take out your leftover seeds and inspect them to see if they are still good. It's common to have seeds leftover that you purchased for last year's garden. If stored properly the year before (in a cool dry place) many of your seeds will germinate the next year. Most seed packets have a date or a year they were packaged stamped on them. This information is useful because some seeds do last longer than others. If you are not sure, you can always do a simple seed germination test. Just take ten seeds and place them on a dampened paper towel and fold the towel over to cover the seeds. Place the paper towel in a zipped bag that has been partially closed. Let them sit for about a week before checking again to see if the seeds have started to germinate, making sure to keep the towel moist. At the end of the appropriate germination time, count the number of seeds that have sprouted and multiply it by ten to get the germination rate for the seed. A higher rate suggests that the seeds will be okay this year. Sowing them in a little heavier than normal if you plan to sow them directly into the garden. You can always purchase a bit more new seed to add to the old.



Mt. Clemens Beautification Advisory Commission—Your March Hosts

What's happening in the "Clem" you ask? If you're a member of their Beautification Advisory Commission, you would be involved in these Points of Pride Projects:

Read Across America: Partnering with education with the 3rd graders at Seminole Elementary School, reading books about trees and nature. This year focusing on our national tree, the oak tree.

Arbor Day: This is celebrated with 3rd graders as they help plant a tree on the school grounds. The Arbor Day Foundation's "Trees are Terrific" curriculum is used in the classrooms before planting. Eight students are chosen to dig the hole. On Arbor Day, the students help shovel dirt around the tree, and place mulch at the end of the ceremony. Classrooms take turns watering the tree. The 15th tree will be planted in 2015.

Yard of the Year: This is a celebration of those homeowners who go the extra mile to make their front yards special with a Yard of the Year Awards Ceremony. Seventy residents are acknowledged in an evening ceremony. A Grand Prize Winner is given a Beautification tile for their yard. The city is divided into seven neighborhood areas. Ten yards from each area are nominated. The three finalists from each area are judged by a team of Master Gardeners.

Senior Light Tour: Two weeks before Christmas, Senior Citizens from the three senior residences in Mt. Clemens enjoy a tour on Dial-A-Ride busses. They view residential Christmas light displays. The seniors love the opportunity to get out along with receiving a candy cane, a small ornament, and a free bus ticket.

Snowflake Award: Beautification members view residential Christmas decorations in their area of the city, and find the one house that WOWS! them. Seven winners are contacted via a surprise letter that they won, and are presented with a certificate and snowflake ornament during the first City Commission meeting in January.

Adopt-A-Garden: The Folsom Rock is in a spot of beauty in the city where Beautification members get down and dirty as they weed and plant annuals accented by Hosta and tall ornamental grasses. They also assist the city by weeding a triangle garden on busy S.B. Gratiot.

City of Mount Clemens Gateway Plantings: The goal of Mt. Clemens Beautification is to landscape all the "Gateway" signs into the city. A Wiegand's Nursery landscape architect has worked with us to come up with a theme for the six sign areas. Two have been completed in hopes of getting number three done in 2015.

Thanks for hosting our March 19th Quarterly at 7:00 PM at the Mt. Clemens Library, 150 Cass, Mount Clemens.

Save the Date—June 18th Quarterly Will Be Hosted by St. Clair Shores

The St. Clair Shores Beautification Commission is honored to be hosting the BCSEM Quarterly Meeting on Thursday, June 18th at the St. Clair Shores Golf Club. They are pleased to announce a very special guest speaker for this event, Mr. John Cullen, President of the World Cup of Gardening. He will

be giving a "sneak preview" to this upcoming event, to be held on Belle Isle in June 2016. Mr. Cullen is the owner of Celtic Gardens in Dexter, Michigan, and a celebrated designer in his own right. Make your reservations early. Save the date cards with information, date, time, and more will be mailed to all members in mid-March.



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"I'm a great
believer in
luck, and I
find the
harder I
work, the
more luck I
have."

Thomas Jefferson

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The Magic of Seeds—by The National Garden Bureau Inc.

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Check the directions to see if the seeds need light or darkness to germinate. Those that need light should not be covered with the soil mix, but should be pressed down (not buried) so that they make contact with the moist medium. Those that need darkness should be lightly covered with the mix (1-2 times the seed thickness) and can be placed in a dark place or covered with black plastic or something else that will keep the light out. Labels are a must for keeping track of what's what. All seedlings tend to look alike, and you may forget what you sowed and where. Use wooden flat sticks or plastic markers that you can write on to place in the containers. To give the proper humidity for germination and eliminate the need to water until the seeds sprout, place the container in a plastic bag and tie it shut. To keep the plastic from resting on the mix, the labels you placed in the containers will do the trick. Containers should be in a good light but not direct sun during germination. Keep the containers warm. Seeds that require high temperatures to germinate can be placed in a sunny location.

Germination...Germination times vary so don't get too anxious and think nothing is happening if your seeds don't sprout right away. For seeds with long germination times, check the container occasionally to make sure it hasn't dried out. When most of the seeds have sprouted, you can remove the cover and keep the container in good light, but not direct sunlight. Keep the growing mix moist.

Transplanting... When seedlings have developed four true leaves, it's time to thin them out. Where you have two or more seedlings growing together, snip off the weakest looking one with scissors, so the remaining plant can grow stronger. Gradually move them into more and more sunlight each day. Feed the plant with a water-soluble fertilizer once a week, using half the strength recommended. Keep your seedlings watered until the proper planting time. About a week before you are ready to plant in to the garden, place the young plants outside in a shady, sheltered area. After a few days, move them into more light, gradually working them up to full sun. If the nights are very cool, move them in at night and back out during the day. This gets the plant used to the outdoor conditions.

Getting Started Outdoors...As weather allows, some flowers and vegetables seeds will do well sowing them directly in the soil, but the soil must be prepared to ensure success. The soil needs to be turned, and clumps broken up. Spread an inch of compost or peat moss over the top and rake it into the first two inches of soil. Most plants and vegetables do well in a pH of about 6.5. You can have your soil tested to determine the acidity. Lastly, an application of a dry fertilizer such as 5-10-5 is a good idea. It usually takes 2 lbs. per 100 square feet. Sow seeds into a prepared soil, and keep moist until seedlings appear, then water regularly.

Having started your plants from seeds you will appreciate the real magic of a garden.