

Down to Earth

Michigan State University Extension Master Gardener Program—Genesee County

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Letter from the Program Coordinator

Barslund Judd (juddbars@msu.edu)

Spring is getting closer! It feels like we are almost there. Almost might be a bit of a stretch, but I remain hopeful. All sorts of exciting things are happening this year. I'm in the process of solidifying several educational classes that will be held in Flint. We are building partnerships with local groups and working together to bring educational opportunities to the entire community! When we work with other community organizations and partnerships, it helps us all make our community a better place.

Our new Extension Master Gardener Training class recently started. We have 39 exceptional trainees from all sorts of backgrounds and experience levels. We've attracted trainees from as far away as Kent County! Darren Bagley from 4-H has already given presentations on water and soils. We've also had presentations from Deirdre Hope and Lori Imboden, both members of the Consumer Horticulture team. It's been a great opportunity to make new friends and learn more about the community. I'd also like to thank the many volunteers that have graded quizzes, setup for classes, and guided the new trainees. These volunteers are hardworking with smiling faces that make a positive impression on our fresh trainees.

I will be presenting at the February MGAGCM (Master Gardener of Genesee County Michigan) monthly membership meeting being held March 20th. My topic will be Cactuses and Succulents That Prickle Your Fancy. I can't wait to see everyone there!

As a teaser, some of the upcoming educational topics to be held at the MSUE Flint office include:

- Grasses and Sedges in the Garden
- Insect Pinning and Identification
- Produce Safety in the Home Garden
- Invasive Plants

Upcoming classes will be announced as they are scheduled. I'm looking forward to a year of team building and education!

Inside this issue

Letter from the Coordinator	1
Flushing Butterfly Garden.....	2
Apple Adventures.....	3
Puzzle	4
Outreach/Garden with Kids.....	5
Harvesting Basil.....	6
VMS Corner.....	7
President.....	8
Upcoming Events	9

Newsletter Committee

- Sue Crisp (**Project Report**)
- Mary Yelland (**Article Liaison**)
- LaDonna Gamble (**Hotline Articles**)
- Joanne Gensel (**Association Page**)
- Michelle Chockley (**VMS Corner**)
- Carol Pittard (**Editor**)
- Cheryl Borkowski (**Format Editor**)

If you are interested in writing an article for the DTE newsletter, please feel free to reach out to us! We love having new input and hearing new perspectives. We ask that articles have an educational component that is research based and utilizes solid sources.

Featured MSUE Project

Flushing Butterfly Garden

Sue Crisp - Project Lead

You may ask, “Why is ‘Busters Corner’ on the small electrical box located near the garden?” Well, in the 1990’s the popular “Busters” Marathon Gas Station occupied the property at the corner of E. Main Street and S. Maple Street. Buster retired in the following years when EPA regulations were becoming more strict. The City of Flushing eventually demolished the gas station and cleanup of the land was completed. The Riverview Park was extended along the Flint River and up the hill beyond the car wash all the way to E. Main Street.

The garden was started by Brent LaPonsey in 2011 after [he applied for and received a Keep Genesee County Beautiful grant which was matched by ELGA Credit Union](#). It was planted by local volunteers and then tended by various volunteers including some Girl Scouts. In time everyone moved on to other ventures.

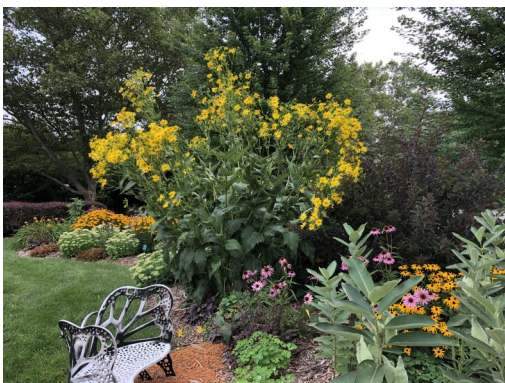
In 2015 Michelle Chockley asked MaryBeth Seaward if she would take it over. MaryBeth had been project lead of the MSUE Demonstration Herb Garden at the old Flint Farmers Market, a project that ended when the market moved. She was not eager to lead another project, but since it was a small garden, MaryBeth agreed to take over as project lead.

Julie Odegard and MaryBeth worked on the garden in 2015, with some help from their husbands, Michelle and her boyfriend, and occasionally, Pat Densmore. As not much had been done the year before, they cleaned up the area. They dug up the bricks from our projects at the old Farmers Market and moved them to the Butterfly Garden where they continue to edge the bed today. Then they brought over some cone flowers, all the daylilies, planted some butterfly weed, and butterfly bushes. Finally, they mulched the bed to improve the appearance and to help with the weed issue.

The following year Julie, MaryBeth and Pat continued to maintain the bed. They planted the now huge cup plant, a gift from Nettie Sparks. Tony Nowiski became the new director of the Flushing DPW and was the new garden contact. The next year, which was 2017, Tony asked if we would take over maintaining the entire clock corner because we were doing such a good job. He explained that the DPW didn’t have the expertise and the time to do it justice. MaryBeth told him if we could get some more volunteers, we would do it. There was a new Extension Master Gardener class that year. Sue Crisp and Renee Vredeveid joined the team. Randee Pieper and Carol Mitsdarfer joined us the following year.

Sue took over as project lead when MaryBeth retired in 2019, and Renee became co-lead. After attending some educational events including the MG bus trip, we decided to introduce some new plants including sage and fennel to the garden in hopes of bringing more Monarchs, plus other butterfly species. To our delight, we witnessed many more Monarchs playing in the flowers this past summer. MaryBeth continues to help and inspire our MG team with this garden adventure.

The community supports this garden with many positive comments in person and on facebook. Come out and enjoy the peaceful setting along the river in Flushing.



Directions to project and project lead contact information

Location: The Community Clock corner which is the southwest corner of Main St. and Maple St. in downtown Flushing.

Project Lead: Sue Crisp

scrispski@gmail.com

Apple Tree Adventures of a Novice Master Gardener

By Sherri Kerby, AEMG '15, Oakland County

Within a year of completing my training as an Extension Master Gardener, my husband and I decided to sell our house in Clarkston and look for a home that better suited our lifestyle. We eventually found a home that sits on a five acre parcel in Highland, Michigan.

We settled into the house and found out from the previous owner, and from our neighbors, that the overgrown apple trees (7 of them!) on the property were McIntosh and Honeycrisp varieties. These trees had not been pruned in a long time, but we were determined to try to revive them so they would produce apples.

One of our neighbors owns a tree nursery. He was very helpful, loaning tools, textbooks, giving advice and lending a hand as I got started with the pruning. Progress was slow at first as the trees were terribly overgrown, and I started out with some basic necessities; trimming the trees away from the house, power lines and other trees.

I learned that the best time to prune fruit trees is in the winter. My dad, a horticulturist, said that I should only prune in the "R" months! (October, November, December, January, February, March, April or basically, during the cold months when the tree sap is down). Attending a seminar on pruning at Ashton's Orchards in Ortonville taught by Bob Tritten of MSUE helped me to fine-tune this to pruning in December–March. <https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/smart-gardening-pruning-and-training-backyard-apple-and-pear-trees>.

I started to learn more about pruning older trees. The first year I cut out all the watersprouts, and trimmed out some of the center branches to admit more light. Of course, many more grew in that spring/summer, but I've continued to trim them out (watersprouts can be trimmed in July), and the trees are beginning to be more open and spreading.

The second and third year I addressed the problem of the height of the trees. You have to be able to reach the apples that grow! Also, the top of the tree actually shades the lower branches. I learned that you can cut the tree size by 30%, without damaging the tree, so I focused on reducing the height of the trees. I cut out the leads, and identified small new branches to replace them as the tree continues to grow. Again, I trimmed out branches that pointed inward, downward, or crossed other branches, encouraging the tree to open out.

In the interim, I met another neighbor who also had fruit trees. He offered to expand his spray program to include our fruit trees. This turned out to be very helpful, as the fruit that we had obtained in the first few years had worms and spots. Here is a MSUE publication about fruit tree spraying: <https://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/Ag.%20Ext.%202007-Chelsie/PDF/e1723-1989.pdf>

After 3 ½ years, the groundwork had been laid for a harvest! Each year the trees produced more, better quality apples. It was time to consider what we would do with them! We knew that if all the trees produced apples, we couldn't eat all of them. I had canned a small amount of applesauce during the first few years, but we knew we needed a plan.

Last spring, after lots of research, we found an advertisement online for a home cider press. A family in North Carolina had purchased it with the intention of making their own cider, but had never used it. The price was considerably lower than a new one, and so we decided to go check it out. We chose the weekend, hopped in our truck, drove straight through to North Carolina and bought the press including all the gear. We were thrilled! We bought a book on how to make both sweet and hard cider, and spent the summer reading. https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/its_cider_time

Over the summer, the apples developed and grew, and when our grandchildren visited, we encouraged them to climb the trees, and check out the size of the apples. We tasted the sour green ones, and waited for the first blush of red to appear.

Featured Article, continued

Finally, in September, the apples were ready. We picked twice. On the first pass, we picked all the apples that were ripe, and two weeks later all the remaining apples were harvested. They were placed in a 4' x 8' rack across two sawhorses in our garage to "sweat" in preparation for crushing. We let these apples sweat for 3-4 weeks, then in October made our first batch of cider.

We washed the apples, filled the hopper, turned the crank, and then when we had a barrel of chopped apples, transferred them to the press. Of course, when the first stream of cider started to run out of the press, we grabbed a couple of paper cups and had our first taste. It was the sweetest cider I've ever tasted!

We processed this first batch of apples, then when the second batch was ready, our grandchildren came to help. At ages 5, 3 and 1, they loved getting wet washing the apples in the galvanized washtub and playing with the hose. Then, they stood on stools and popped the apples from the bucket into the hopper. Grandpa had to help turn the crank when it was particularly hard, but everyone enjoyed tasting the fresh cider as it ran out.

We followed the instructions in the cider making book to pasteurize the fresh cider, canned some for use as apple juice, and sent our son and his family on their way with several frozen tubs to be used to flavor his homemade mead. And our Thanksgiving feast was topped off by mugs of steaming hot mulled cider. What a wonderful treat!

This winter I'll inspect each of the trees again to see what kind of pruning I need to do to have a good crop in the upcoming year. The trees on the western-facing side of the property definitely bore more fruit because of the sunlight, maybe I can find a way to provide more sunlight for the trees on our eastern side.

For Christmas, we received some hard cider making equipment from our youngest son. Perhaps we will be making hard cider in 2020!

Gardener's Logic Puzzle

Read the story and follow the clues to solve the puzzle. You can print and use the grid to help solve the puzzle by putting an X to cross out possibilities and putting an O to mark a correct answer.

Gardeners Frank, George, and Ben all work on large properties. One of them tends to the Smith's garden, one tends to the Jones's garden, and one tends to the Maple's garden. In one garden, only native plants are grown. In another, exotic plants are everywhere. In the third garden, vegetables are grown for the family's supper. Using the clues below, work out which gardener grows which plants in which garden. Good luck!

Clues:

1. Frank is the only gardener who grows vegetables.
2. The exotic plants aren't grown in the Smith's garden.
3. George doesn't work at the Jones's.
4. Vegetables are grown at the Jones's.
5. Ben doesn't work at the Smith's.



Answer:
 Frank grows vegetables in the Jones's garden.
 Ben grows exotic plants in the Maple's garden.
 George grows native plants in the Smith's garden.

	Vegetables	Exotic	Native	Smith	Jones	Maple
Frank						
Ben						
George						
Smith						
Jones						
Maple						

Outreach News

Kay McCullough

Genesee County Extension Master Gardener Tour 2020 (Sunday, June 28th from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.)

The MGAGCM Garden Tour will be in the Swartz Creek area this year on Sunday, June 28 10 a.m.–5 p.m. We thought it would be fun to have a child's drawing contest for the front cover of our ticket this year. Children 12 and under may enter the contest. Master Gardeners will vote to select the winner for the cover of the garden tour ticket at the April meeting. Mail the picture to Kay McCullough 4069 Jennie Lane, Swartz Creek, MI 48473 or take a picture of it with your phone and send it to Kay's cell phone: (810) 610-0545.

MMGA, Inc. Membership Dues It's time again to pay your \$5.00 MMGA, Inc. membership dues. Don't miss the March 1st deadline. We are trying to make it easier for you by having some direct links in the lower left corner on our website:

<https://www.geneseecountymg.org>

Three Ways to Pay Dues

1. You can click the "Downloadable \$5 mail-in dues form" button, fill it out and send a check to the address provided.
2. To pay online, click the "To pay membership dues on-line" button and follow the prompts. Below that button, there is some of the wording you'll see if you make that choice.
3. You may prefer to pay at the February meeting and have our chapter mail it in for you.

Choose the best method for you to renew your MMGA, Inc. membership.

Gardening With Kids

Mary Yelland

Gardening with Kids...Regrow Romaine Lettuce

A fun winter project is to regrow some Romaine lettuce.

You will need a: head of Romaine lettuce

- sharp knife
- shallow bowl of water
- spot near a window



1. Using a sharp knife, cut off the lettuce head about an inch or two from the bottom of the stem and use the lettuce as you normally would. Kids make sure you get the help of an adult before using a sharp knife!
2. Put the stump flat side down in a shallow bowl of water. You will only need about a half inch of water; do not cover the whole thing.
3. Put the dish with the lettuce stump in a sunny spot. Change the water every day or two.
4. After a couple of days, you may start to see some growth. In a week or two you can have leaves large enough to pick and eat. You can make a tiny salad or put the leaves on a sandwich.

Time to Harvest!

Mary Yelland

Basil



While outdoor growing and harvesting is not possible this time of year, many herbs can still be grown and harvested indoors. Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) is an annual herb that cannot survive temperatures lower than 50° F. If you grow it in your herb garden, it has long since died. However, you can grow basil in a sunny window or under a grow light. This plant is an annual and will not live long-term as a houseplant. Yet, it can provide you with fresh basil until you are able to plant it in your garden in the spring.

There are dozens of types of basil with different flavor profiles. The classic basil is a large leaf type from the Genoa area of Italy, the pesto capital of the world, thus named Genovese basil. While there is variability in the size of the leaves and plants, Genovese basil will typically have leaves around 3 inches and plants 1 to 2 feet tall. There are a few ways to get a basil plant going in your home, cuttings, seeds, and plants. If you have a basil plant in your garden, before it gets too cold, you may want to start a plant from a cutting to keep inside during the winter. You can start a basil plant from seed. Plant seeds in potting mix and keep them warm (above 70 degrees is best). Seeds should germinate in 5-7 days. It will take a month or two before the plants will be large enough to harvest some leaves. Since most greenhouses are closed this time of year, you may think it is difficult to find a basil plant. However, many grocery stores now carry potted herbs in the produce section for two or three dollars each. Look for healthy looking leaves that have not withered. Since the grocery department does not tend to the plants you may have to keep checking until you find a fresh shipment that has not sat around on the shelf. After you bring your plant home, you will likely need to transplant it into a larger pot since these plants are sold in very small containers that do not give the roots room to grow. Don't let the plant get dried out, but good drainage is important as letting the roots sit in water will kill the plant as well. You can harvest and use the leaves by cutting off up to a third of the plant. Cutting will encourage bushier growth. If your plants send up flower buds remove them. This will allow the plant to keep better flavor and to possibly live longer.

If you don't want to grow your own plant, you can often find harvested leaves in the grocery store. The best way to store the leaves is as you would cut flowers; in a jar of water on your kitchen countertop. Remember, basil does not like the cold and storing the leaves in the refrigerator can cause them to quickly turn black and slimy. Wash your leaves just prior to use. Basil is often combined with tomatoes, pasta, peas, and zucchini. Finely chopped or blended basil can be mixed with garlic and olive oil for a flavorful spread for bread, pasta or chicken. Try adding some chopped fresh basil to tomato soup or blend some with olive oil, pine nuts and parmesan cheese for some pesto. While fresh basil has more flavor, the leaves can also be dried and crumbled for longer term storage. You can also use some fresh basil in the following recipe for caprese style salad.

Caprese Style Salad

1 head of romaine lettuce washed and chopped
2 cheese sticks (mozzarella or string cheese) sliced

1 large tomato diced
6-8 large fresh basil leaves, sliced or chopped

Balsamic salad dressing

1/2 cup olive oil
1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
1 clove garlic, minced (or 1/2 tsp garlic powder)

1 teaspoon honey
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

For dressing, combine all ingredients and mix well. To serve, mix salad ingredients and top with dressing. The dressing can be mixed in, however, since the balsamic vinegar makes a brown dressing, mixing makes the salad look brown and less appetizing.

Interesting fact: mustard and honey add flavor, but also act as emulsifiers to counteract separation of the oil and vinegar making a smoother dressing that needs to be mixed less often.

VMS Corner

Michelle Chockley—Lead VMS Ambassador

VMS Log in: <https://michigan.volunteersystem.org/UniversalLogin.cfm>

Winter Blues?

It's time to plan your garden and your EMG Educational hours for 2020!

I am sure you all have been busy looking at seed, bulb and perennial catalogs for unusual plants or ideas to add something new to your garden. This is also the perfect time to work on those educational hours before the busy gardening season begins. I know folks have the best intentions to complete education when the season ends, but it doesn't always work out. Look at these opportunities and have a plan. This list includes the most common opportunities.

Educational Opportunities Include:

1. Attending the monthly MGAGCM association meetings the third Thursday of each month. There is a speaker at 6:00 p.m. for one hour of free education for you (except for April, July, November & December).
2. MSU free webinars located on VMS home screen. You can choose any that are of interest to you. If you need help logging in to any, please contact Barslund Judd or one of the ambassadors.
3. Edible Flint classes in April – free education opportunity. Watch for details.
4. Barslund is planning some educational classes for EMG's and the public. Please watch for these upcoming events. Details TBA.
5. If you are interested in becoming an official "Smart Gardener," please contact Michelle Chockley for the Smart Gardener Description and Smart Gardener Training Checklist. Training is done at your own pace and is free. You can get about 8 hours.
6. Attend the educational garden tour in Genesee sponsored by MGAGCM. Education credits vary year to year.
7. Conferences are popping up now. These come at a cost but are always well worth the speakers and vendors. Don't forget our local conference put on by MGAGCM the first Saturday in October. If you don't want to sign up by yourself, you can email the MGAGCM group through VMS to see if anyone is going so you can carpool.
8. Master Gardener College is June 12 & 13th at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing. Details are on the VMS under State Links.
9. Garden Club speakers, MSU Conferences (not advertised as EMG ed. credits) and speakers at nurseries or other locations need to be cleared with Barslund to assure topics qualify for education hours not advertised— speaker lists are reviewed by Barslund Judd to assure topics qualify for education hours. Not all are eligible for EMG ed. credits as they may be targeted to commercial gardeners or just not applicable.

The screenshot shows the VMS user interface. On the left, there are two main navigation menus: 'Administration' and 'Event Calendars'. The 'Administration' menu includes links for Manage VMS, Manage Roster, Add Calendar Event, Manage Projects, Newsletters/Documents, Hour Reports, Contact Reports, and Photo Albums. The 'Event Calendars' menu includes Hotline Calendar, General Events, and View All Events. The main content area features a welcome message: 'Welcome to the MSU Extension Gardener Volunteer Management System (VMS)! You are a member of the Genesee roster.' Below this, it provides contact information for Barslund Judd, Michelle Chockley, Joanne Gensel, and Mary Yelland. A red arrow points to the 'State Links' menu on the right, which contains various links such as '2019 - Finding Accurate Internet Info', '2019 - Free Online Education Webinar List', '2019 - State Project Categories & Definition', '2019 Ext. Master Gardener Trainings', 'Frequently Asked Questions - FAQ', 'Master Gardener Program Web Site', 'Michigan Master Gardener Association (MMGA)', 'MSU Extension Bookstore', 'Smart Gardening - MSUE Gardening in Michigan Website', 'VMS - User Guide', and 'VMS Ambassador List - 2019'. At the bottom, there is a 'Links' section with a link for '2010 Association Meeting Speakers &'. A reminder at the bottom states: 'Reminder: If you did not report the required hours for 2018, all hours must be caught up and reported in the VMS by Dec. 31, 2019.'

Master Gardener Association Genesee County

The Master Gardener Association of Genesee County Michigan (MGAGCM) is an association of Extension Master Gardeners (EMGs). Membership is optional for certified Extension Master Gardeners. The MGAGCM provides support to local EMGs through project funding, plant signage, and extra educational opportunities.

Note from MGAGCM President—Joanne Gensel

Hello Master Gardeners! We are making progress on new efforts.

- The outreach team is developing Q&As for the light up boards. They are also working on materials for the trifold boards and coming up with ideas for the “Spinning Wheel.”
- There is room for anyone who would like to participate. If you are out of state for the winter, you can help by re-searching information for Q&As.
- The hotline area and storage room have been decluttered to use the space efficiently. We will post the inventory and location on the MGAGCM website. A new checkout and return system is in the works.
- The new EMG class has started. We’re hoping to grow our team in Genesee County. Consider being a mentor to a newbie. It doesn’t take much effort. Invite them to meetings, sit with them, and introduce them to others. You could also take them to your project a time or two. Try to think how you felt when you were new and what would have helped. Let one of the board members or Barslund know that you will mentor someone.
- There will be no more paper copies of minutes, agendas, etc. at meetings. I will email a copy of pertinent documents before meetings. We will display them with the projector during the meetings. The files will be stored on the MGAGCM website.

Here is the link to the website: <https://www.geneseecountymg.org/>

Thank you,
Joann Gensel, President

2020 MGA Membership Meeting Schedule		
1/16/2020	2/20/2020	3/19/2020
4/16/2020 Award Banquet	5/21/2020	6/18/2020 (Wojo's?)
7/16/2020 Picnic	8/20/2020	9/24/2020
10/22/2020	11/19/2020 Holiday Party	December (no meeting)

Master Gardener Association Genesee County

Websites:

MGAGCM Website—www.geneseecountymg.org

MGAGCM Facebook Page —www.facebook.com/groups/216904628327310/

MMGA Inc Website—www.michiganmastergardener.org

MMGA Inc. Facebook Page—www.facebook.com/MichiganMG/

Upcoming Events:

MGAGCM February Meeting at the GCCARD Bldg. (Thurs., Feb. 20, 2020) *“Cactuses and Succulents That Will Prickle Your Fancy,”* with Barslund Judd

MMGA, Inc. membership submission (deadline: March 1, 2020)

MGAGCM March Meeting at the GCCARD Bldg. (Thurs., Mar. 19, 2020) *“Michigan Invasives: A Look At The Past, Present and Future,”* with Brian Van Patten (from ForMar Nature Center)

MGAGCM Native Plant Sale at Davison Farmers Market on May, 16, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. – more information to come

Master Gardener College, Gardening Visions for 2020 and Beyond, on the campus of Michigan State University (June 12 & 13, 2020)

https://www.canr.msu.edu/master_gardener_volunteer_program/master_gardener_college/

MGAGCM Annual Garden Tour (June 28, 2020 10 a.m.-5 p.m.) Swartz Creek/Rankin area

<https://gcgardentour.weebly.com/>