

Down to Earth

Michigan State University Extension Master
Gardener Program—Genesee County

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Greetings Everyone!

This year has gone by so fast, and when looking back at what you have all accomplished, it is amazing. Despite the restrictions that have slowly been lifting, many of you have been volunteering and helping each other out when needed. I just found out that the *Edible Flint* project, the Farm, grew 4,494.88 pounds of food that was distributed to the community and local food banks. Congratulations to the *Edible Flint* team and the Extension Master Gardener volunteers who support this project.

Some folks have asked what the plan is for the DTE (*Down To Earth Newsletter*) for 2022. We have decided to publish issues quarterly, which would be February 15, May 15, August 15, and November 15. This will allow more time for our DTE team to put together educational and useful information for you. We will continue with project profiles, an educational article, the children's activity, recipe, upcoming events, Ask Extension and Association news. Starting in February, we are aiming for a full issue.

We need to hear from you with any ideas or suggestions you may have for the DTE. You could contribute an educational article too! Time spent counts towards volunteer hours. Please send your ideas or if you wish to volunteer to Michelle Chockley, chockleym@gmail.com.

Remember to get your 10 hours education completed and logged on Volunteer Central (VC). If you need help, please contact myself or Michelle Chockley at chockleym@gmail.com.

Genesee County Extension Master Gardener information and past DTE newsletters can be found at: https://www.canr.msu.edu/genesee/master_gardener1

Wishing you and yours a Happy Holiday Season!

The Down to Earth Newsletter Team



As seen on the
MGAGCM
Garden Tour
August 14, 2021

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- Mary Yelland (**Article Liaison**)
- Mel Kennedy (**Ask Extension**)
- Joanne Gensel (**Association Page**)
- Michelle Chockley (**Volunteer Central Coordinator**)
- Carol Pittard (**Editor**)
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Feature Article

Saffron

By Mary Yelland

Hey, what's that spring looking flower doing in my fall garden? It may be saffron. Saffron, known as the world's most expensive spice, costs over \$4,000 a pound and is sometimes called red gold. While over 80% of the world's crop is grown in Spain and Iran, saffron can easily be grown in Michigan. This valuable seasoning is harvested from three red stigmas found in each purple flower. Upon harvesting, saffron can be used in a number of ways.

Saffron comes from the plant *Crocus sativus*, and is a fall flowering crocus. It is part of the Iridaceae or iris family. While it looks like the familiar spring crocus, this flower grows from a corm that is planted in late summer. The leaves come out in September and it flowers in October (or slightly later). The flower has 6 purple petals, 3 bright yellow stamens, and one red pistil made up of three stigmas. These 3 red threads, when dried, make up the spice saffron. Flowering in fall, this plant is often confused with the poisonous colchicum plant. However, the colchicum, also called meadow saffron or autumn crocus, is not a true crocus but is in the lily family.

Saffron corms can be grown in nearly any climate. The type of soil is much more important than the climate. These plants like a well-drained soil with neutral pH in a sunny location. The corms can be planted in the ground or in containers, but will easily rot if left in a very wet environment. Once a suitable spot has been chosen, plant the corms 2 to 4 inches deep and about 3 inches apart. They should be placed in the soil flat side down. The best time to plant is from June to mid-September. The saffron flowers are sterile and will not produce viable seed, however, the corms will multiply. Because of the plant's sterility, there is very little genetic diversity among the plant species, making a single variety of the plant.

The crocus will grow slim, grass-like leaves of 4 to 12 inches in early spring. Hot weather will bring about summer dormancy with no evidence of the plant. It is easy to forget they are there and plant summer flowers over the underground corm. A second crop of leaves will grow in fall, followed shortly by the showy purple flowers. When the flowers are in bloom, it is time to harvest. Each of the 3 red threads must be harvested by hand. This can be done by trimming the stigmas from the blossom with a fingernail, scissors, or tweezers. If large scale production occurs, it is often easier to pick the entire flower and then sit in comfort at a table to extract the red saffron filaments. After separating the saffron, it can then be laid out on a paper towel to dry. It takes about 150 flowers to make one gram of saffron. Dried, the threads are very light and fragile. After drying, the saffron should be placed in an airtight container, in a cool dark place, for at least a month. Fresh saffron has no flavor, but after sitting it will keep its flavor for 2 years.

Squirrels, mice, and voles are fond of saffron corms and may present a problem with growing the plant. Rabbits also enjoy eating the leaves and flowers. While there are no serious insect or disease problems with the plants, there are 3 different fungi that can cause harm and are resistant to most fungicides. Fungus does not usually affect the plants for the first 3 to 4 years. At that point, the corms should be moved, and it is best to not use the site for saffron again for 10 years.

Once harvested, dried and matured the saffron is ready to be used. The spice is known for its bright red color and its bitter sweet musky floral flavor. Research is also being done as to the plant's medicinal properties. Even though the dried spice is a dark red, a few strands produce a bright yellow dye. This was used in ancient times to color food, clothing and even ink. Saffron can be used in parts as small as 1 thread in 10 gallons of water to produce a golden color! Its exotic flavor is also of old. Saffron is even mentioned in the Bible in the time of King Solomon. Today it is popular in many cultural dishes of rice, fish, and chicken, as well as puddings, breads, and desserts. While many people love the spice, many also hate it, claiming it tastes like metal, paint, or gasoline. Some also claim it is an acquired taste that takes getting used to.

Beyond the color and taste, saffron is also being used in the medical field. In ancient times, Hippocrates recommended it for indigestion and toothache. Modern day, it is thought of as an aphrodisiac and a relief for PMS. It is also being researched for use in nervous system disorders, as a pain blocker, as an anti-inflammatory, and many other areas of medicine.

Feature Article

Saffron, Continued from page 2

Saffron corms are not easily found at local nurseries or other local sources for bulbs and may need to be special ordered. Saffron may be grown as an easy way to add some fall color to the garden. It can be used to try out an expensive spice in a cheap way for personal use or to share with friends. You may be inspired to try some new recipes or try some natural plant-based coloring. Whatever your reasoning, *Crocus sativus* may be a plant you'll want to try in your garden.



Don't be confused. The saffron leaves are small grass like leaves by the flower. The other more visible leaves are creeping thyme that grew over the underground corm in the summer months.



A few harvested and dried saffron threads. Even these few could be around 50 cents.



As seen on the MGAGCM Garden Tour - August 14, 2021











Gardening With Kids



Gardening with Kids by Amy Lazar











Autumn is here and it is time for all the fun outdoor activities such as harvesting pumpkins, jumping in big piles of leaves, and going on hayrides. Here is a Bingo game your child can play with you or a friend. Use the Bingo Caller's Card to call the bingo items and to keep track of what's already been called. Print two copies of the caller's card. Cut one up along the lines, fold them in half and place them in a bowl. Print one copy of the Bingo Cards and cut the paper in half so each player gets a card. To play the game, take turns drawing a folded square out of the bowl and reading it out loud. After an item is called, the caller should cross that item off on the caller's card and then each player should cross out the matching item on their Bingo Card. The winner is the first person to get 5 in a row either vertically, horizontally or diagonally. Note: Don't forget to cross off your free space!











Bingo Caller's Card

hayride		pine cones		harvest
squash		migrating birds		Thanksgiving
bonfire	November	pumpkin pie		corn maze
	apple picking	donuts	cider	
autumn				

Gardening with Kids

Bingo Cards

	harvest	pine cones	autumn	
	corn maze			Thanksgiving
cider		Free Space!	migrating birds	donuts
hayride	bonfire		squash	
	apple picking	pumpkin pie		November

	harvest	pine cones	autumn	
	corn maze			Thanksgiving
cider		Free Space!	migrating birds	donuts
hayride	bonfire		squash	
	apple picking	pumpkin pie		November

Time to Harvest Sage

By Mary Yelland

The herb bottle read, "This herb goes well with pork, beef, duck, chicken recipes, and is essential at Thanksgiving."

"Aha," the cook exclaimed, "That is some sage advice."

Sage, that important fixture to the traditional Thanksgiving dinner, may be found growing in your garden. Native to the northern Mediterranean region, sage is rather strong-flavored even among other herbs. Sage is in the mint (Lamiaceae) family and in the genus *Salvia*. While there are over 500 species of *salvia*, two of these may be found in your spice rack labeled as sage. *Salvia officinalis* is likely the sage plant that is grown in Michigan herb gardens and harvested by gardeners. It is a perennial evergreen that can usually withstand a Michigan winter. However, *Salvia fruticosa* (formerly *Salvia triloba*) or Greek sage accounts for more than half of the sage sold commercially in the United States. These two are different species and also different from the white sage native to Southwestern United States and known for making sage sticks for smudging or burning.

Salvia officinalis includes several varieties that are grown in Michigan including purple sage, tri-color sage, and golden sage. However, the traditional green sage may be more winter hardy than variegated varieties. These evergreen plants can grow up to 3 feet wide and tall. Sage prefers a sunny location with well-drained soil. It will tolerate drought and poor soil fertility. The plant should be trimmed back a few times in the summer to encourage new growth and prevent the plant from getting woody and spindly. The best time to harvest sage is in the morning after the dew has dried but plants are not hot. Harvesting should be done before the plant blossoms as the flavor is stronger. To harvest, cut stems of 6 to 8 inches cutting off up to a third of the plant. Harvesting may be done 2 or 3 times a year after the plant is established. Sages tend to get old and woody after a few years and should then be replaced. After the stems are cut, wash, and bundle them together. Tie small bundles with a string and hang them upside down out of direct sunlight. In 2 to 4 weeks the leaves should be dry and brittle. Remove leaves from the stems and store. Sage is found commercially as ground or rubbed. Ground sage is when the leaves are ground up to a fine powder. Rubbed sage is fluffier and is made when the leaves are rubbed together or crumbled. You can do either with your own leaves as you prefer. While these instructions may be the preferred ways to harvest, it is safe to harvest sage anytime. If it is November and you want some fresh sage, it is fine to pull off a few leaves for a recipe.

If someone is not familiar with sage, the most common reaction to smelling the plant is, "It smells like stuffing." While the Thanksgiving staple is the most familiar use of sage, it also provides flavor to many other dishes. Frying fresh sage leaves in butter, like in the pumpkin ravioli sauce, brings out a less familiar yet still delicious flavor from the herb. Try some of your home grown, or store-bought sage in these recipes.



Homemade Sausage

- 1 teaspoon ground sage
- 1 teaspoon salt (for reduced sodium use potassium salt)
- ½ teaspoon dried parsley
- ½ teaspoon dried minced onion
- ⅓ teaspoon oregano
- ¼ teaspoon each, garlic powder, black pepper, thyme, smoked paprika, and ground coriander
- Small pinch of nutmeg
- 1 pound of ground turkey or pork

Mix all ingredients and refrigerate for at least an hour. Cook in patties or as desired.

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Time to Harvest ...Sage

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Quick and Easy Pumpkin Ravioli



Ravioli

- 1 15-ounce can pumpkin puree (or use 1½ cups mashed pumpkin or other winter squash)
- 1 clove of garlic minced (or ½ teaspoon garlic powder)
- ¼ cup grated parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 12-ounce package of wonton wrappers

Sauce

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 10 fresh sage leaves (or substitute 1 tsp ground sage)
- 1 tablespoon flour
- ¾ cup chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 tablespoons heavy cream
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Extra grated parmesan cheese as garnish

For ravioli: Mix pumpkin, garlic, cheese, salt and pepper. Lay out half the wonton wrappers. Brush with water to moisten. Place 2 teaspoons of filling in the center of each wonton wrapper. Top with another wrapper and seal edges. (If edges are not sealed well, the filling will leak out.) Drop ravioli a few at a time in boiling water. Boil for 3 minutes. Drain.

For sauce: Slice sage leaves into thin strips and set aside. Place butter in a frying pan and heat until it melts. Continue heating and it will foam up and then settle down and start to brown. At this point add the sliced sage leaves and then the olive oil. Cook until the leaves are crispy (this will happen quickly). Remove from the heat and stir in the flour and then broth. Return to the heat and cook until mixture boils. Stir in cream, salt and pepper.

To serve: Place ravioli on a serving plate, top with a spoonful of sauce and a sprinkle of parmesan cheese.

* If you would rather, the recipe can be made in a casserole or lasagna style. In a baking dish layer wonton wrappers, pumpkin filling and prepared sauce in alternate layers starting with wrappers and topping with sauce. Bake at 350°F for about 30 minutes until the interior temperature of 190°F is reached.



Ask Extension

Variation on Ask Extension

Shared with us by Mel Kennedy

Are you interested in preserving your garden bounty? The MSU Extension has a variety of online and in-person classes about preserving fruits and vegetables. One of the mid-November sessions is about preserving food for gifts! [Go to this link](#)



Are you planning to overwinter frost-sensitive plants? Christopher Imler and Sarah Rautio write about that topic in ***Overwintering container plants***. It includes these sections:

- Temperature effects on plant survival
- Preventing pest problems
- Assessing the light environment
- Fertilizing and watering during winter

[Go to this link](#)



The acorn crop this year is nuts! Dr. Bert Cregg speaks to this in his recently published ***Cones and acorns appear in copious quantities this fall***.

[Go to this link](#)

Planting bulbs for beautiful blooms next spring? Here are some tips and tricks to ensure your spring bulbs come back year after year in the article entitled ***Where are my bulbs? Why aren't they flowering?*** by Isabel Branstrom and Sarah Rautio. It includes these sections:

- Bulb Quality
- Site Selection
- Planting time
- Climate extremes
- Planting depth
- Animal browsing and disturbance
- Practices to help bulbs and blooms return
- Dividing Bulbs
- Choosing bulbs that establish better than others

Go to this [link](#)



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

Note from President - Joanne Gensel

I don't have a lot to say here except to watch your incoming email for messages from **Master Gardener** which is what we are calling the MGAGCM email. We have been communicating through that more often having sent out over a dozen messages since July.

Information about both the election and Holiday Party were sent out via that email. We hope you will take part in the election, work on getting your education and volunteer (if you have any this year) hours into Volunteer Central, and hope to see you at the Holiday Party!



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Master Gardener Association Genesee County

Websites

MGAGCM website—www.geneseecountymg.org

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

MMGA, Inc. website—www.michiganmastergardener.org

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

MGAGCM Events:

- Jan. 21: **Galls** – Lori Imboden, Consumer Hort Educator from Oakland County
Project ID: Environmental Stewardship - Integrated Pest Mgmt (IPM)
- Feb. 18: **Gardening for Pollinators** – Jay Blair
Project ID: Environmental Stewardship: IPM - Pollinators
- Mar. 18: **Comfort, Ease & Simplicity** – Jan Bills
Project ID: Community: Beautification - Public Areas
- Apr. 15: **What's New for 2021** – George Papadelis
Project ID: Community: Beautification - Public Areas
- May 20: **Growing a Mostly Perennial Cutting Garden** – Jane Giblin
Project ID: Not required for 2021, but be complete in your description when entering in Volunteer Central
- June 17: **Eating the Weeds in Your Garden** – Darren Bagley
Project ID: Not required for 2021, but be complete in your description when entering in Volunteer Central
- July 15: **Turf Alternatives and Ground Covers** – Barslund Judd
Project ID: Not required for 2021, but be complete in your description when entering in Volunteer Central
- Aug. 19-21: [Master Gardener College](#) – If you didn't attend, you can register to watch the Zoom recordings!
- Aug. 19: **Greening the Garden: low input gardening** – Isabel Branstrom
Project ID: Not required for 2021, but be complete in your description when entering in Volunteer Central
- Sept. 16: **Gardening with Nature**—Gretchen Giles
Project ID: Project ID: Not required for 2021, but be complete in your description when entering in Volunteer Central
- Oct. 21: **Michigan Native Plants: Wildflowers, Grasses & Wildlife** – Angela Nelson
Project ID: Not required for 2021, but be complete in your description when entering in Volunteer Central
- Nov. 18: **Holiday Party** at Burton Senior Center: deadline to sign-up & pay \$5.00 was Nov. 6

2021 MGAGCM meetings and or presentations are held on the third Thursday of each month via Zoom until MSUE gives permission for in-person meetings at which point, they will be held at the Burton Senior Center located at 3410 S Grand Traverse Street, Burton, MI 48529 (*except December & unless otherwise noted*).