



*(Article by Liz Will and photo by Melanie Fuhrmann)*

Few flowers bring more cheer to the garden than sunflowers. They're quick to grow, easy to care for, and loved by gardeners of all ages. Give them full sun, regular watering while they're getting started, and they'll reward you with big, bold blooms all summer long.

Sunflowers come in many sizes, from compact two-foot plants to towering ten-foot giants. Their golden faces draw in pollinators like bees and butterflies, and later in the season, birds flock to the seed heads. You can even save seeds for next year's planting or enjoy a few as a snack yourself.

## **The Oakland Gardener**

September 2025

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### **Monthly Plant Feature**

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#### **Native Plants for a Better Tomorrow!**

Article and pictures by: Jamiel Dado

If you've been gardening for any length of time, chances are you have heard the term "native plants." Perhaps you have wondered what exactly that means, and whether or not it would be of any interest to



you. Maybe you've been looking for a way to give back to the Earth and help the local wildlife. Well, if you have, then read on.

### What is a “native” plant?

The general **definition** of the term “native plant” refers to any indigenous plant that has evolved naturally in an ecosystem. Also, only plants that were found here before European settlement are considered native. Furthermore, when we talk about

native plants, we are specifically referring to the indigenous plants from our particular region.

### Why should I grow them?

Native plants bring much needed biodiversity to our gardens. There are many types of butterflies that require specific **native plants** in order to survive and prosper. In addition to knowing that you are helping them thrive, you get the bonus of having a garden that is filled with all the ethereal beauty they have to offer. And wherever the butterflies do well, so do our **birds**, which rely on them to feed their babies.



Besides from being essential to our local wildlife, native plants offer many other benefits that we might not consider at first. There is of course the aesthetic aspect to many of them. Black-Eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*) and Cardinal Flowers (*Lobelia cardinalis*) exhibit beautiful blooms and have been readily found in many people's collections for years. Both are considered native to our region.

Besides from their attractive nature, native plants require less work than non-natives once established. Due to their deep roots, they require less watering. Also, they are less prone to pests, and don't need as much fertilizer!



### Which native plants should I get?

As with all gardening, plant choice is a deeply personal decision based on your own desires for your space. Also, as always, you want to pick the right plant for the right place, making sure that you have the proper light requirements and soil for the particular plant you are thinking about adding to your garden. It is beneficial, and easy to get a **soil test** done so you know exactly what you are working with. Then,

consult a **list** of native plants to find which ones fit your particular environment.

### Where can I purchase native plants?

Many local nurseries carry and even specialize in native plants. Armed with your list of plants, you'll be able to make an informed purchase. Also, local growers are frequently involved in native plant sales in the community and often set up at



farmers markets. Oakland County Parks hosts a yearly native plant **event** where they supply more than 600 free plant kits to residents. The kits are divided into four categories that cover a range of light and soil parameters.

There has perhaps been no better time to get involved with growing native plants than now. There are more groups and resources than at any other time. Whether you are starting a garden from scratch and want to make it entirely native, or you would like to simply add one or two to your already full space to see what will happen, you can feel good about being a part of an exciting and much needed movement!

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## Extension Master Gardener News

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### Cultivating Knowledge and Community, The SOCWA Healthy Gardens Project

Article by: Leah Blinstrub

Photos by: Lillian Dean

As gardeners, we're always eager to learn. We seek the best plants and practices to achieve meaningful results. Whether producing food, beautifying a space, or enriching the soil with compost, our goal is to promote healthier plants and natural defenses against disease. More than most, we care deeply about the environment and want to see nature thrive.



The Oakland Gardener is pleased to highlight the **SOCWA Healthy Gardens Project in Royal Oak**. This Extension Master Gardener (EMG) project connects with both Master Gardeners and the wider community to demonstrate earth-friendly gardening practices. These practices protect water quality, capture carbon, enhance the soil food web, and cultivate healthy plants. The gardens are maintained using compost and natural mulches, without the use of pesticides.

Coordinator Lilian Dean brings contagious enthusiasm to this project, which is home to forty-six species of native trees and shrubs. The site serves as a living classroom for continued education and community outreach. Volunteers are always welcome to tour the gardens, learn from the project, and assist with its care.

Master Gardener volunteers also have the opportunity to participate in the **SOCWA Master Composter Program**, gaining hands-on experience with sustainable composting practices.

The Healthy Gardens Initiative is seeking volunteers through the end of October. Whether you're a Master Gardener or simply a



gardener who cares about the environment, this is an excellent opportunity to learn, contribute, and support a thriving community space. **New gardeners are welcome; simply notify Lilian in advance by phone or email so she can look forward to your arrival.**

### **Volunteer Information:**

- **Where:** 3910 Webster Ave, Royal Oak, MI 48073
- **When:** Mondays, 10:00-11:30 a.m., April through October
- **Contact:** Lillian Dean
  - Email: LFDDean2@gmail.com
  - Phone: 248-225-7928

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## **Gardening Tips and Tricks**

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### **Garden Photography 101**

Article and Photos by: Annie Fairfax

While we all wish the blooms in our gardens and the ones we visit could last all year, learning to photograph what we grow while we can is the next best thing. Not only do great photos mean we can reflect upon our successes (and learn from our failures), it's also a great way to plan next year's garden by deciding which cultivars you'd like to try again, and which spaces could use something new. Below are some great tips and tricks to get you started on your botanical photography journey.



#### **Find the Right Light**

Most people make the biggest photography mistakes when it comes to lighting. It's a common misconception that more light is better for photography. In reality, the opposite is true. Too much bright, overhead light will wash out details and colors while also casting harsh shadows.

Instead, bring your camera or cell phone camera outside on a cloudy day. Without dramatic shadows and loss of detail brought about by bright sunlight, your photos will look more like they do through your eyes. Another great option is to take photos during golden hour, the hour or so before the sun sinks beyond the horizon when everything is colored by warm sunset light.

#### **Try Editing Apps to Improve Color, Texture, and Contrast**

Many editing apps are free to use and can make a world of difference in bringing your garden to life through photography. For cell phone photographers, search your phone's app store for apps like Lightroom Mobile, Canva, InShot, or VSCO. Those with DSLR cameras will benefit from learning to use Lightroom to edit their



photos. If that feels a bit too daunting, start with **Adobe's free online photo editor** – no credit card required!

Play around with the settings to find an editing style you like. Maybe you want to increase saturation to make your images more colorful. Perhaps, you'll enjoy sharpening or increasing the texture of your photos to really make them pop. Most, even allow you to brighten up dark shadows, making the entire image come to life.



### **Practice Makes Perfect**

Professional photographers spend years honing their editing styles into something unique and recognizable. With that in mind, don't give up if your photos don't turn out exactly as you'd like them to look at first. Keep practicing. Follow free editing tutorials on websites like YouTube, and don't be afraid to keep trying new techniques, software, and apps until you find one that feels right.

### **Change Your Perspective**

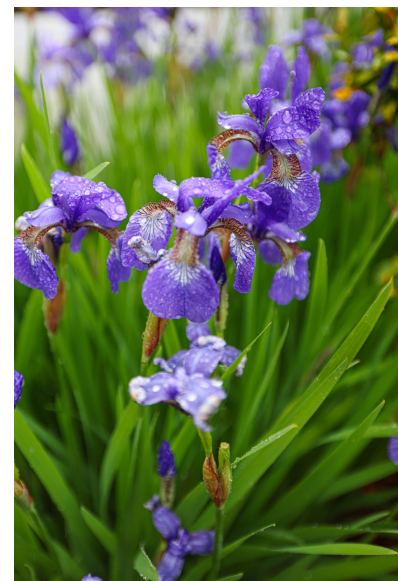
Perspective, or the relationship between objects, can make or break a photo. A thousand people could photograph the same flower and each picture would look different. That's the beauty of selecting the right angle, distance from your subject(s), and settings on your phone or camera.

When photographing your garden, or someone else's, don't be afraid to lay on the ground and photograph your subjects from below. Consider, if it's safe to do so, grabbing a step stool and taking a photo from up high. The world of photography is your oyster, and the only thing limiting your creativity is the amount of time you want to dedicate to honing the craft. If at first you don't quite like your photo, try a new perspective.

### **Taking Your Photos to the Next Level**

If photography is something you're serious about, I'd like to challenge you to take a few photos every single day for an entire month. Doing so will teach you the beauty of photographing freshly opened blooms just after a rain shower when everything is glittering and clean. It will also teach you how to operate your camera in every type of setting whether you're indoors or out, it's overcast or sunny, and through different times of day.

Take time each day to learn one new thing about the camera you're using, whether it's how to adjust the brightness on your camera phone, or a new editing technique in Lightroom. Discover your inner photographer and cultivate a style that's uniquely you instead of trying to emulate anyone else. Photography, like gardening, is the perfect way to unleash your creativity and create something beautiful to share



## Gardening Deep Dive

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### Seed Saving Basics for Gardeners

Article by: Liz Will

Photos by: Abby Fuhrmann &  
Sowrightseeds.com

Have you ever thought about saving your own seeds? It's a simple, rewarding practice that gardeners have been doing for generations. Not only does it save

money, but it also helps preserve your favorite varieties and even makes your garden stronger year after year. Plus, it's always fun to share your seeds with a friend!

### Why Save Seeds?

Seed saving is about more than just saving money. When you collect seeds from plants that grew well in your soil and climate, you're setting yourself up for success in the seasons ahead. Over time, these plants become better adapted to your conditions.

It's also a wonderful way to preserve heirloom varieties that you've come to love. By saving and replanting, you're keeping those varieties alive for the next generation of gardeners.

### Best Plants for Beginners

If you're new to seed saving, start with plants that are naturally self-pollinating. These are the least likely to cross with other varieties, so what you save is true to type. Some of the easiest include:

- Beans and peas – simply let the pods dry on the plant.
- Tomatoes – once fully ripe, seeds can be cleaned and stored.
- Lettuce – collect the fluffy seed heads after the plant bolts.
- Peppers – scoop out seeds from fully mature fruit.

Marigolds – Once the flowers dry on the plant, you can pluck out the long, slender seeds from the flower heads. Super simple and they germinate well the following year. Zinnias – Let the blooms dry completely on the stem, then pull apart the cone-like center to collect the seeds. They're very forgiving and a favorite for beginner seed savers.

Choose just one or two plants to start. That way, you can learn the process without feeling overwhelmed.

### How to Save Seeds

The process is fairly easy, but timing is important:

1. Choose your best plants. Always save seeds from strong, healthy plants.



2. Harvest at the right stage. Let pods dry on beans and peas. Pick tomatoes and peppers when fully ripe. Wait until lettuce and flowers produce mature seed heads.
3. Clean the seeds. For dry seeds (beans, peas, lettuce, peppers), a simple shake or rub will do. For wet seeds (like tomatoes), let them ferment in a jar for a few days to reduce the gel coating and reduce disease, then rinse and dry.
4. Dry thoroughly. Spread seeds out on a paper towel or screen until they are completely dry.



### Storing Seeds

The three important factors in storing seeds are “cool, dark, and dry.” Store seeds in small envelopes, glass jars, or ziploc bags. If you have silica packets, add it to help absorb extra moisture. Always label with the plant name and the year. With good storage, many seeds remain viable for several years.

### Give It a Try

Seed saving doesn't have to be tricky or complicated. Start small, experiment, and enjoy the process. Before long, you'll have a collection of homegrown seeds ready for each new season, and a great gift on hand for your garden loving friends!

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## Gardening for Health and Wellness

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### Tick Safety for Gardeners & Outdoor Enthusiasts

Article by: Annie Fairfax

Photos by: Erik Karits and Nadiia Shuran on Unsplash

Few outdoor pests are as worrisome for people and pets alike as the tick. When once cold Michigan winters limited their populations, climate change has allowed them to survive and thrive all year long in most of the state. That means there are more ticks threatening us than ever before each time we set foot outside our doors. Here are some tips to keep you and your family safe from ticks and the life-altering diseases they can carry.



### Understanding the Enemy

The first step in being tick aware is to know what you're looking for. Check out [this fantastic tip sheet](#) about ticks to learn how to identify them, learn about where they live, when they're most active, and the illnesses they can cause, like Lyme disease. Teach your family, especially small children and those who enjoy spending time outdoors, what to watch out for. The best way to stay safe from ticks is to avoid them in the first place. The second-best way to keep yourself safe is to remove them as soon as you find them.

## **Perform Frequent Tick Checks**

Last month, we discussed the importance of taking frequent breaks when gardening in the heat to rehydrate and rest. Breaks are also a great time to do a quick tick check. Sometimes as small as the tip of a pencil.

## **Wear Protective Clothing**

Keep as much of your skin covered as you can while gardening. It's a great way to not only prevent sunburns or rashes from irritating plant matter, but if ticks can't get to your skin, they can't bite you. Tuck pants into tall socks, shirts into pants, and long sleeves into gloves. If possible, cover your neck with a bandana or hood beneath a hat for added protection. Wearing light colors will help you spot ticks sooner. Although they may become discolored by gardening, washing clothes in bleach can help keep them bright and clean.

## **Use Tick Repellent**

Using tick repellent can help keep ticks off your body and away from your home. Be sure to read the label and follow the directions carefully, as most should not be applied directly to your skin and can be dangerous if inhaled. Apply them as directed, focusing on shoes and gloves, but don't rely on repellent completely. It can help, but it isn't always enough to keep ticks off.

## **After Gardening**

Be careful not to inadvertently bring ticks into your home. They could drop off your clothing, climb around, and find you again later. Shake off loose dirt outside, away from your home. Use a lint roller to clean up any exposed skin as well as your clothing. Ticks, if present, will adhere to the lint roller and can be discarded. It's a good idea to drop your clothes straight into the wash, clean up your entryway by vacuuming and sweeping, and then follow the steps below.

## **Shower & Perform a More Thorough Check**

After gardening, before you hop in the shower, perform a more thorough tick check of yourself, or recruit a partner to help. Check creases and folds, between fingers, behind ears, around the scalp, and warm or moist areas— anywhere that might be easy to overlook. Finding and removing ticks promptly is crucial for preventing tick-borne infections. The longer ticks remain attached, the more likely they are to pass on any illnesses they may carry. It's also a good idea to keep an eye on yourself over the next few days after gardening, where ticks may be present, as they can be challenging to spot at first. As they feed on you, they become engorged and easier to spot.

## **What To Do If You Find A Tick**

**This tip sheet** offers excellent advice on what to carry when going outdoors, as well as guidance on how to remove ticks should you find them. One of the most important things you can do if you do find a tick, other than swiftly removing it, is to keep it in your freezer labeled with the date, time, and location you found it. Monitor the bite site for any signs of Lyme disease, which appears as a red bull's-eye on the skin. If you develop symptoms or notice anything off about the bite site, take the tick with you to the doctor. They will be able to test it for Lyme disease or other tick-borne illnesses.





Knowing what the tick was carrying will help you get the treatment you need, if necessary.

### **Plant Tick Deterrents**

Some plants with strong fragrances, such as lavender, lemongrass, sage, garlic, onions, marigold, catnip, citronella, and geranium, all repel ticks. While they're not entirely foolproof, ticks are much less likely to hang out in those plants, making them excellent choices for container gardening around doorways and in areas of your yard where you've found ticks in the past. Ticks also like feeding on deer, so keeping them out of your yard with fences and other deer deterrents may help reduce the number of ticks you encounter in your garden.



Smart Gardening is MSU Extension's campaign using earth-friendly messages to help gardeners make smart choices in their own backyards. The goal is to equip gardeners with a "tool kit" of research-based knowledge to use immediately at home. Whether choosing plants, using garden chemicals, fertilizer or applying water, gardeners need to understand the long-term impacts on their communities. For more Smart Gardening information click [here](#).



### **Ask Extension**

Call the MSU Extension Lawn and Garden Hotline at 1-888-678-3464 (Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9am to noon)

## **Upcoming Events**

### **The Meadow Brook Garden Club**

Friday, September 26, 2025  
at Meadow Brook Hall, 350 Estate Dr., Rochester  
MI 48309-1904

Coffee and refreshments will be served at 9:15 a.m. with program to follow at 10:00 a.m. It began with a small, backyard patch of soil to feed a



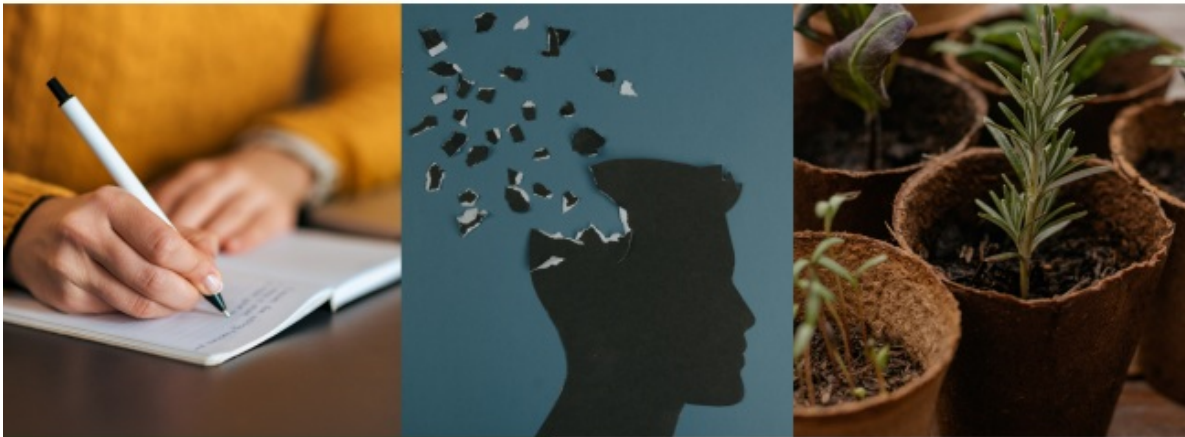
sandbox village at age five and continues today on his challenging acre of sand and gravel. Join us as Don LaFond of the North American Rock Garden Society presents “A Garden in a Gravel Pit.” Don will share the lessons he learned about gardening in this harsh environment with the help of his friends at Arrowhead Alpines, who taught him what rock gardening was and is.

Please enter through the new DeCarlo Visitor Center. Guests are welcome and reservations are not required. There is a \$5 non-member fee. For more information, call 248-364-6210, email **[MBGC@Oakland.edu](mailto:MBGC@Oakland.edu)**.

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Website**

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## News You Can Use



**Lawn update: Summer**



## New box tree moth alert for Michigan homeowners and residents

**Caitlin Splawski, Michigan State University Extension** - August 25, 2025

Since first being detected in Michigan in 2022, box tree moth has spread and established itself in a 13-county area in southeastern and central Michigan. Visit the Michigan Department of Natural Resources [Eyes in the Field website](#) for current quarantine counties and reporting. Please note that you do not need to report box tree moth sightings within the quarantine counties.

**Read  
More**

## stress shifts to fall recovery

**Kevin Frank**, Michigan State University, Department of Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences - August 25, 2025

This summer was one of extreme temperatures, high humidity and precipitation excesses and deficiencies. The result was stressed turf, high weed and disease pressure, and less than perfect turfgrass conditions. For long stretches this summer, the weather was quite simply brutal for growing turf. Dew points were in the upper 60s to low 70s for extended periods that, combined with high temperatures, especially high nighttime temperatures, created ideal conditions for numerous diseases.

**Read  
More**







## Featured Five 2025: Favorites from DGI Propagators Trial Garden

Heidi Lindberg and Caitlin Splawski, Michigan State University Extension - August 26, 2025

Are you seeking proven performers for the season ahead? Check out Part 1 of our series highlighting top picks from the 2025 Michigan Garden Plant Tour trial sites.

[Read More](#)



## The honk heard across the Great Lakes

Kelsey Bockelman and Bindu Bhakta, Michigan State University Extension - July 30, 2025

Close your eyes and listen — the unmistakable honking drifts through the air, a familiar sound that, along with their V-shaped flight and striking black necks with white chinstraps, makes the presence of the giant Canada goose instantly recognizable. Giant Canada geese are an inextricable part of our Michigan landscape.

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