

The Tollgate Farm News

VOLUME 32

ISSUE 2

FEBRUARY 2026

MSU Tollgate Garden Volunteers General Meeting

Thursday, February 19, 2026
7:00PM
(A Zoom Meeting)

Native Bees of Michigan

Reminder: Tollgate gardeners and supporters meet on Zoom in January, February and March

Join Tollgate volunteers and supporters on Zoom on Thursday evening, February 19, to learn about native bees.

Retired teacher, gardener, beekeeper and grandmother, **Kim Wood** will talk about native bees of Michigan. Did you know there are 15 different species of bumblebees and over 450 species of native bees in the mitten state?

At her home in North Muskegon, Kim lives happily with her husband, several dogs and cats, a city yard full of perennials, and an apiary full of honeybees. Kim enjoys sharing her passion for pollinators with others. Teachers never truly retire.

Kim's website, [Waggle Dance Honeybees – Honeybee And Pollinator Education By Kim Wood](#), has handouts with bee puns and information on various topics, plus book reviews for kids, beekeepers, gardeners, crafters and others, just bee-cause.

TOLLGATE GARDEN VOLUNTEER IMPORTANT DATES AND EVENTS 2026

FEB	MEETINGS		MAR	MEETINGS	
3	TGAC Meeting – Zoom	7:00 pm	3	TGAC Meeting – Zoom	7:00 pm
19	TGV General Meeting - Zoom	7:00 pm	19	TGV General Meeting - Zoom	7:00 pm
FEB	WORKDAY ACTIVITIES		MAR	WORKDAY ACTIVITIES	
	No workdays planned for February		7-8	MAPLEFEST	9:00am-3:00pm
			14	Pruning	9:00 am
			21	Grass Cut Back - all	9:00 am
			28	Pathway/Demo mulching	9:00 am

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FARM UPDATE FROM THE RESIDENT FARMER - *Destiny Pearson*

Winter Holds on at Tollgate, but Spring is on the Way



Snow has truly taken over Tollgate, blanketing the farm in a quiet, wintry calm. The fields rest beneath layers of white, paths crunch under boots, and the pace of the season is still slow. Even so, there's a growing sense of anticipation around the farm as we begin to look ahead to warmer temperatures and longer days.

Inside the animal barn, life is already on the move. Our does are busy "cooking up" their babies, and we're eagerly preparing for kidding season. We anticipate six does giving birth toward the end of March, and behind the scenes, plans and preparations are quietly underway to make sure everything is ready when the time comes.

Out on the rest of the farm, volunteers are beginning to thaw out and re-emerge as well. We've been seeing quite a few familiar faces returning to gear up for the maple syrup season and start planning garden beds for the year ahead. The early signs of spring work are taking shape even while snow still covers the ground.

Though winter is holding on, Tollgate is far from dormant. The sugar maples are getting attention, garden plans are forming, and new life is growing quietly in the barn. With each passing day, the farm edges closer to its busiest and most vibrant time of year.

For now, we wait patiently, watching the weather, tending to what can be done, and looking forward to the season ahead. Spring is coming, and Tollgate is ready.

Destiny Pearson
Livestock Coordinator/Assistant Farm Manager
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Photos by Linda Piasecki

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NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT - *Renee Cottrell*

"In winter, I plot and plan. In spring, I move."- Harry Rollins, American singer, poet, actor

The cold and snow of January are chasing us right into February! Stay safe and warm and plan for spring. Tollgate garden planning activities have begun. Our Area Garden Leaders, AGLs, are working on plant selections, planning and budgets working towards the beautification and care of the gardens for the upcoming season. See the article in this issue on AGL/Team opportunities.

February Reminders:

- The garden activity calendar has been posted for 2026. Saturday group workdays are scheduled to start March 14th.

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/tollgate/uploads/2026-uploads/Garden-Newsletters/TGAC 026 Calendar.pdf>

- Our membership meetings will continue to be in Zoom format through March. We then move to in person meetings April through October. Please join us to socialize with fellow members and enjoy informative speakers!
- Tollgate Garden Volunteers membership renewals continue! Renew on-line NOW to avoid disrupted communications for the 2026 season. See Membership notes in this issue for details and contacts.

Renee Cottrell, President
Tollgate Garden Volunteers
248-251-4505
rmcottrell4@att.net

Find Yourself a Rewarding Team Experience!

Throughout the Tollgate Gardens we have sites that would greatly benefit from a little extra attention and hence, the concept of the Area Garden Leaders (AGLs) and Teams. These teams with a lead volunteer would contribute to the overall management of a specific garden by monitoring the needs of the garden, participating in the designated maintenance activity and directing work at the site. All the gardens welcome new team members. The following gardens request immediate assistance and will provide orientation. Joining a team does not prevent you from working in other gardens individually or on Saturday group days. Please take the time to review some of the opportunities listed below. See the link for garden descriptions and orientation for more information. **Highlighted gardens are in need of an AGL.**

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/tollgate/uploads/2024-Upoades/Tollgate%20Garden%20Volunteer%20orientation%202025.pdf>

- Demonstration Gardens: AGL is Lee Kindermann requesting co-AGL and team members. Experience a wide variety of perennials and shrubs
- **Founders/Rose Garden**: AGL needed with interest in roses, requesting team members. Enjoy working with roses and a variety of companion plants
- **Rock Ledge Garden**: Seeking an AGL and team members for work in rock garden type area
- Office and Heritage Gardens: AGL Susie Sherman seeking co-AGL and has need for team members. Office offers diverse perennial and shrub plantings as does the Heritage garden with focus on 1850's species.
- Plant A Row (PAR) garden: AGL Kathryn Fitzpatrick requests co-AGL and additional team members for an experience in the propagating, planting maintenance and harvest of vegetable plantings

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- Children Gardens: Native prairie AGL Karen Harris requesting co-AGL and team members interested in native plantings that capture the imagination of children.
- Children Gardens: Shade garden and Vine maze AGL Paula Brose is requesting co-AGL and team members for both areas with Vine Maze focus on the growing of perennial and annual vines and pruning needs.
- **Children's Garden Collection**: Renee Cottrell currently oversees Children's Entrance, Fence, Pond, East Tollbooth and seeking AGLs and teams
- Rain Garden: AGL Connie Marcangelo welcomes any interested team members and anyone interested in re-design for new sun area after the loss of the large maple in 2025.
- **Sakura Japanese Garden**: AGL and members needed. A smaller garden area surrounding the tea house, great potential for design development, is more remote location compared to other gardens. See Renee
- Constructed Wetland- AGL Dave Komraus is always looking for team members for the native and planned plantings in this large area.
- **Enabling Garden**- AGL Renee Cottrell- This offers an experience in container plantings with emphasis on accessibility for those with mobility challenges.
- Xeriscape- AGL Marilyn Alimpich invites new team members to experience the plantings of drought tolerant plants.
- **Nursery**- Looking for a Lead who has an interest in learning new plants with a knowledge of data bases for inventory purposes. This team is key to our annual fundraising.

Contact Renee to be put in touch with these gardens leads to learn more about these rewarding opportunities.

PAR Report - Kathryn Fitzpatrick



Winter has set in with a vengeance, and the snow is deeper than it has been in a long time. The deep freeze is also reaching record proportions. But this is good for our crops as it increases cold hardiness, helps suppress pests and disease, and helps with soil nutrient management as it helps break down soil particles through frost-heaving.

We are well on our way to getting set up with the requisite seeds and plant material to start transplants in the greenhouse. This year we will be starting all but the garlic, potatoes, turnips, pole beans, carrots, and radishes in the greenhouse. We will be marking the PAR crops in the CSA fields to help us stay on top of the vegetables for donation while allowing us to work single crops for both PAR and CSA, but we will be benefiting from any surplus from the CSA yields – definitely a win-win.

Many of the logistics for working the two gardens have been ironed out, but the proof will be in the pudding, so to speak.

As we are adjusting to the new arrangement, I'm sure we will need to address any unanticipated challenges. I am looking forward to the collaboration with the CSA team!

Hope to see you in the garden this year or perhaps in the greenhouse in the spring,

Kathryn Fitzpatrick

Photos by Kathryn Fitzpatrick

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AGL Information – Marilyn Alimpich

Thank you AGLs for your attendance on a snowy January morning! We had an excellent turnout. Many of you have submitted your 2026 Budget Planner requests for review. If you haven't done so, our next TGAC review takes place on March 3rd.

Linda Piasecki and I are also compiling your Plant label requests. Please submit any needed labels as quickly as possible. Only a few short weeks before the garden season commences!

If you have any questions, please contact me at: masoleil@sbcglobal.net, or call or text 734-730-6565.

See you in the gardens,

Marilyn Alimpich
masoleil@sbcglobal.net

[Garden Budget Planner](#)
[Tollgate Label Template Excel Version](#)
[Tollgate Label Template Word Version](#)

Template Example (Word Version)

Common Name	Genus	Species	Cultivar	Garden	Trademark#	Tags
Example						
Eastern Redbud	Cercis	canadensis	'Northern Herald'	Farmhouse		1
Verify spelling and correct names using plant tags or site such as Missouri Botanical Gardens						

Additional Garden Information

New Sending Email for Volunteer Communications

Starting on March 1, we are changing the sending email for our garden volunteer communications to tollgategardens@anr.msu.edu. Depending on your email system, you may also see the sender as "MSU Tollgate Garden Volunteers". This email change is required to support a new communication system. To prevent our communication from going into a SPAM folder, please add tollgategardens@anr.msu.edu to your address book so it will appear as a trusted sender. If you have suggestions or questions, please contact Kathy Johnson at kmj@chartermi.net.



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Benefits of snow cover in the gardens

Snow-Lovely to enjoy from the kitchen table with a cup of cocoa but a pain to drive in and shovel! Gardeners need to look for the silver lining of our winter woes. Snow cover provides many benefits to soil and plants:

- Insulation of roots for plants with less heaving from fluctuating temperatures that could cause root damage
- Protection from soil erosion from un-checked winter winds
- Prevents deeper soil freezing
- Provides a blanket of protection to foliage to lessen desiccation from winds
- Nutrient Boost: Snowflakes trap atmospheric nitrogen, nitrate, and ammonium, delivering these nutrients into the soil as they melt.
- Slow moisture release into soil with melting.

An MSUE link for other info https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/snow_a_welcome_sight_for_farmers

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Lori Heiden – AGL Hosta Garden

Helleborus orientalis



Helleborus orientalis (common name: hellebore) are tough, shade-loving perennials, also call Christmas or Lenten roses, that bloom in winter and early spring with cup-shaped, often nodding, flowers.

Unlike other perennials, the large palmate leaves of Hellebores are almost always evergreen, truly an under-rated feature. They begin blooming in early spring, so they're a first source of nectar for pollinators. Flowers can last more than four weeks.

Hosta Garden – Springtime

Leaves **not** removed

Photo by Lori Heiden

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After flowering, remove old, tattered foliage and spent flower stems to encourage new growth and prevent disease.

Hellebores are largely trouble-free, deer-resistant, and drought-tolerant once established, but require well-drained soil in shade to avoid fungal issues.

You can find Hellebores in the Hosta garden and Demo garden.

Information provided by University of Vermont extension and Missouri Botanical Garden.



Hosta Garden – Springtime
Leaves removed before
flowering
Photo by Lori Heiden

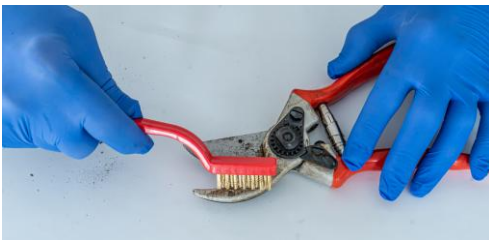
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HOME GARDEN TOOL MAINTENANCE

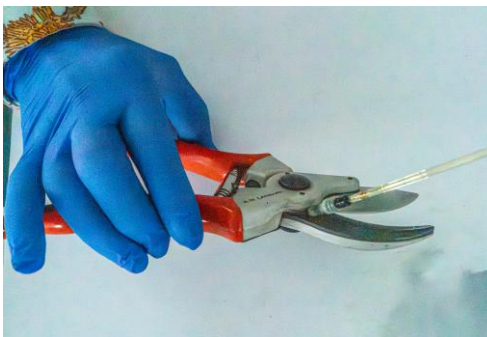
Tool maintenance is an important part of a gardener's life. Winter is a good time to take a good look at your home garden tools. A check to see if they are clean, free of rust and dirt, are sharp and ready to use and are in good, working order. Not only do you want to check your pruners, but also your hedge clippers, hori hori (garden knife), trowels, various shovels, and electric tools. While there are different methods of cleaning, the following is a simple guide in cleaning those tools.



1. Suggested supplies: steel wool pads, rubber gloves, clean rags, wire brush, scotch pads, honing stone (sharpening stone) and oil, machine oil (WD-40), isopropyl alcohol, graphite lubricant



2. Scrub off any dirt, tree sap, or rust with steel wool, wire brush, or rags. Wipe clean with alcohol or machine oil.



3. Oil tool joints with machine oil or graphite lubricant.

A big THANK YOU to Lori Heiden and Marilyn Alimpich for help with this article!



4. Sharpen the blades-
- Sharpen on the beveled side
- Start inside and pull out towards the tip
- Repeat approximately 25 times (or more) beveled side only
- Stroke on the opposite side 1-2 times to remove any burrs

5. Wipe all tools with a clean rag when done.

Photos by
Linda Piasecki

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Our Membership is now Digital!

We're pleased to announce that our membership is now available online!
To get started, use the link provided or scan the QR code to access the digital form.
Important instructions:

- Please fill out every line of the form unless the question specifically says otherwise.
- When you're finished, make sure to hit "Submit" to complete your registration.
- The submission conformation page will contain instructions on how to make your donation.
- Be sure to print the final page for your records and to keep the donation directions handy.
- If you have any questions, please email Destiny Pearson at pears278@msu.edu

Thank you for being part of our growing farm community!

Thank you to the following who have already signed up for membership –

Anthony, Beth	Edwards, Cynthia	Millington, Susan
Belanger, Linda	Gerber, Susan	Monchamp, Catherine
Bohner, Mary	Grifor, Susan	Murphy, Jamie
Bremer, Susan	Harenchar, David	Nehr, Patti
Bretz, James	Hydo, Beverly	Richardson, Carrie
Bretz, Kathy	Jayne, Michele	Rotter, Gary
Cooper, Susan	Komraus, David	Sheipline, Mary
Culkin, Judy	Krause, Vickie	Simmons, Eric
Culkin, Tom	Leroux, Lynette	Smith, Stephen
Currier, Kathryn	MacDonell, Cecile	Stimmell, Colette
Dalter, Pat	Macek, Barbara	VanHyfte, Anna
DeWitt, Lesley	Macek, Richard	Villard, Monica
DiStefano, Flavio	MacLean, Ann	



MAPLEFEST 2026

Maplefest 2026 will be held at Tollgate Farm on March 7th and 8th from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. This event will need volunteers to assist with the event. **Look for an email soon with an event sign-up.** A variety of volunteer positions such as event check-in, greeters, hayride loaders, maple sugar trail educators, and children's activities will be posted. Please consider volunteering.
Hope to see you there!

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Membership Update February 2026

To all of you who donated to help the Tollgate Garden Volunteers make Tollgate a more beautiful place. Your donation is greatly appreciated! The support that you have provided will continue to help our program prosper and grow.

THANK YOU!

Please take a moment to renew your 2026 membership and receive your new identification button for the season!

Thanks!

Teresa LaRosa

[Tollgate Membership Form 2026](#)

[Member Levels Reminder](#)

Tollgate Garden Volunteer
Membership Form 2026



Links to Forms & Other Info

[Garden Orientation PDF](#)

[Tollgate Garden Web Pages](#)

[Other Tollgate Garden Volunteer Info](#)

MSU Tollgate Volunteer Sign-In:



Or

[MSU Tollgate Volunteer Sign-in](#)

NOTE: If you are unable to access or print any necessary forms from the links, please notify Renee, who will arrange to provide copies. Copies will also be available at all in-person TGV meetings.

Take a Tollgate Picture

Send photo files in separate emails, if necessary, to Judy Warren, Tollgate Calendar Editor, at

TGFarmPhotos@gmail.com

Photos are also appreciated for the monthly Farm News. Photo files can be sent to:

Ductapegirl212@gmail.com



Photo by
Linda
Piasecki

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Michigan State University Extension
Tollgate Farm & Education Center

MAPLE FEST 2026

Annual Fundraiser

Register
Now!

Sat. & Sun. | March 7-8 | 9am-3pm Arrival

28115 Meadowbrook Rd, Novi, MI 48377

Pancakes | Tree Tapping | Wagon Rides | Sugar Shack



\$18 in Advance | \$20 at the Door
2 & Under FREE



Register
Here!

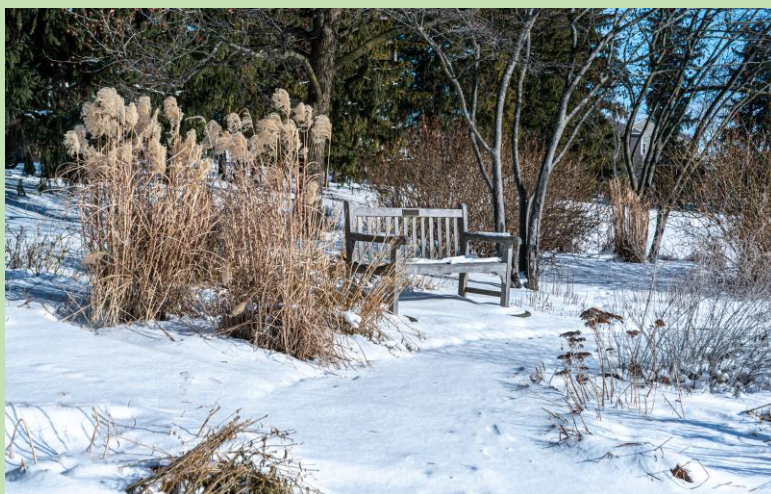
Thank You to our "Sweet" Sponsor!

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TOLLGATE WINNER SURPRISES!



Photos by
Linda Piasecki



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Activity Days: January - October

- Activity Day hours are 9:00 am – Noon, unless otherwise noted on the Activities section of the first page of the newsletter and the full year calendar (see Links page).
- Volunteer Activity Day and Meeting Information will be communicated by email.
- Active members will continue to get email reminders of these activities.
- Lunch will be provided on scheduled workdays.
- We strongly recommend you bring your own tools for your garden activities. All tools borrowed from the Tool Shed should be cleaned and sanitized with the wipes provided, prior to returning the items to the Tool Shed after use.

Tollgate Garden Advisory Committee (TGAC)

Volunteer Liaison – Destiny Pearson

248-347-3860 Ext.251 pears278@msu.edu

PresidentRenee Cottrell

Vice PresidentMarilyn Alimpich

Secretary.....Theresa Bridenbaugh

TreasurerKaren Harris

Membership

& Hospitality.....Teresa LaRosa

CommunicationsKathy Johnson

ProgramsJackie Stengel

Farm News Editor.....Linda Piasecki

Event CoordinatorLori Heiden

- The TGAC meets monthly virtually **on Zoom on the first Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM**. All Tollgate Garden Volunteer members are welcome to attend and should contact Destiny Pearson for meeting link.
- Contact information for individual TGAC members and Area Garden Leaders (AGL) are available by contacting Renee Cottrell at rmcottrell@att.net to have message or contact forwarded for response. Contact info can also be found in the Garden Binders in the Volunteer Communication Center.
- Tollgate Volunteer Membership is renewed annually. The 2026 Tollgate Garden Volunteer membership is valid from **January 1, 2026 to December 31, 2026**.

- For membership questions or to update your current membership information, email Teresa LaRosa at tlrrehab@gmail.com
- For general Tollgate information and questions, contact Destiny Pearson or see Website: <http://tollgate.msu.edu/volunteering/>
- TIP: If you aren't getting The Tollgate Farm News email, check your SPAM folder


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