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# Genesee County Master Gardener Newsletter

## DOWN TO EARTH

# MAY

**2016**

**VOLUME 14**

**5**



### FEATURE ARTICLE

## Digging, Dividing and Replanting Bearded Irises



So you have some bearded iris that you want to move, or that aren't flowering as well as they did a few years ago? Chances are that they need to be dug, divided, and replanted....and now is the time to do it in late July, during the month of August and to mid-September in the Bay Area.

Cease watering a week or two before the day that you dig, to edge the plants into full dormancy. If the ground be-

comes so dry that it is impossible to dig, water enough to soften the soil again a couple of days before dig day. Use a digging fork and go around the clump to begin to loosen the roots, prying upward with each cut. At this point, if the clump is very large, another person with a second fork may be needed to help pry the entire clump out of the ground. Old clumps become very heavy!

Shake as much soil off the clump as possible, then use a forceful stream of water from a hose to wash away remaining soil. When the roots and rhizomes are exposed, begin breaking away the rhizomes from the clump by twisting them by hand. Save only those rhizomes that are attached to the sides of old "mother" rhizomes. The saved rhizomes should have 4 to 5 leaves in their fans. They are the ones that will be replanted to bloom the following spring.

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NOTE: Once a rhizome has bloomed, that rhizome will not bloom again. Only the “increase” rhizomes that grow along the edges of the “mother” rhizome will bloom, so save the “increase”. Discard all the other rhizomes and leaves by placing in the curbside trash can. Do NOT compost iris plants.

How can a “mother” rhizome be recognized? It may have a bloom stalk still attached. Or it may have a small, round, smooth callus, about the size of a thumbnail, at the leaf fan end where the bloom stalk was attached. It probably will have from one to three new rhizomes with their leaf fans growing off of it. Select the largest size “increase” rhizomes to replant. Trim their leaves to 8 or 10 inches before replanting. And this is the only time to trim leaves. Do NOT trim leaves of plants that will stay in the ground from one year to the next. Then hold the roots of the rhizome in one fist and trim off the long roots below your fist.

If the name of the cultivar that you have dug is known, use a Sharpie pen to write that name on the central leaf of each fan. This will stay on the plant through washing, drying, and replanting ONLY. It will NOT stay on permanently. Now lay the “keeper” rhizomes aside in a shaded location, a garage or cool shed is a good storage area, while the planting beds or planting holes are readied. It will not damage the prepared rhizomes to remain out of the ground for two weeks.

Select a planting location with good drainage that receives a minimum of 5 to 6 hours of sun every day or that is in full sun. Iris may be planted in a bed or as clumps between other plants. Prepare the planting areas by digging at least 12” deep and 2 feet across. Add 1/3 the amount of compost as soil, and a handful of a complete fertilizer with all three numbers the same, such as 12-12-12, for each rhizome that will be planted in the hole. Iris are very heavy feeders. Mix soil and amendments and leave for a week or two, if possible, prior to replanting. The “wait” time is not mandatory, just gives the mixture time to mature.

Just prior to replanting, submerge the rhizomes and leaves in a solution of 1 part Clorox to 10 parts of cool water for about 20 minutes.

Rinse thoroughly with running water, and allow to dry off in the sun. . This washing tells the rhizome to break dormancy and start growing again. It will also tend to prevent most fungal diseases.

For an instant clump, plant three rhizomes of the same variety together. Imagine a large clock face. Leaving an 8 inch circle in the middle of the clock face, plant a rhizome at 12 o'clock (leaf fans at the perimeter of the 8” circle, rhizomes pointing toward the outer perimeter of the clock face), plant another rhizome at 4 o'clock, and the third rhizome at 8 o'clock. Cover the rhizomes with soil, leaving the upper surface of each rhizome even with the soil level.



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**HOME GROWN 847**

**I am associated with a youth group that is interested in learning about vegetable gardening year-round. I don't know anything about plants but I am assured that people in Michigan can do this outside throughout the winter. All you need to do is to tent the area with clear plastic and plants will grow. I want to get the kids growing plants for food. How do we start?**

In very simple terms, you don't. It is too cold to grow herbaceous plants during the winter in Michigan. Herbaceous plants are those that die to the ground when the weather drops to 32 degrees. Perennial plants will regrow from the roots in the spring. The tops have cell walls in the leaves and stems that explode from freezing. For plants that are called annuals, the roots also die. Covering plants with a plastic tent will protect against light frosts but not hard freezes. There's also the problem of the soil becoming too cold for seeds to germinate and plants to grow. If you look at cool season vegetables like peas, carrots and cabbage, the soil temperature needs to be above 40 degrees to even survive. But that's not growing. The desired or optimum soil temperature is 75 to 85 degrees. That's when plants grow and get big enough to harvest. And warm season vegetables like tomatoes, corn and beans need an optimum soil temperature of 85 to 95 degrees which is hotter than your house is in the winter. This means that you cannot get seeds to germinate or transplants to stay alive. Every time you lift that plastic cover, the air temperature drops rapidly. There's also the problem of no sun to warm the trapped air at night or on many cloudy days. Michigan has the third highest amount of cloud cover of all the states. Some people grow plants in heated greenhouses but the house and the heater raise the cost of growing vegetables. During the late fall, winter and early spring, the earth has tipped away from the sun for us in the Northern Hemisphere. There are not enough hours of direct, strong light to grow flavorful vegetables. You may want to learn about growing plants if your goal is to help the kids. You can't teach if you don't know the information and applied it.

**What kind of flowers will grow in clay soil? I have tried to get plants to grow and they just die. I have a small round garden bed and the dirt between the plants hardens up so much that water just runs off. Tell me which plants to buy.**

This isn't about the plants; it's about the soil. For small plants, it is possible to change the soil where they are growing. If you are talking about trees and shrubs, it is impractical to alter huge areas without heavy equipment and lots of cash. Clay is made up of tiny soil particles that are flat and stack tightly on top of each other. The goal will be to dig up the clay and mix it with compost or composted manure to break up the compaction. If you are able to dig down to 18-24 inches in the bed, add compost to the broken-up soil chunks. A good soil is only five percent organic matter so you definitely do not want to try to fifty-fifty the mix. That's excessive. The goal is to dig deeper than the depth of the roots of plants that will grow there. This gives a place for water to pass by roots and collect in big rain events. Try to break the clay into marble or pea-sized pieces. You don't want golf ball pieces with compost between them. Now, do the smart thing and get a soil test to find out if there are nutrient deficiencies or soil pH problems. You can purchase one online or at MSU Extension for \$25. Online, go to: [www.msusoiltest.com](http://www.msusoiltest.com) to purchase a test. After putting in plants, mulch between them with three inches of something organic like wood chips, straw or shredded leaves. This and the organic matter that is now in the soil will prevent hardening. Mulch will help prevent weed seeds from germinating and you don't have to water as often because top evaporation will be limited because of the soil cover.

Gretchen Voyle, MSU Extension-Livingston County Horticulture Educator 517/546-3950



## COOKS CORNER

# PEANUT BUTTER CAKE

2 sticks of butter or oleo  
1 cup of water  
½ cup of peanut butter

Bring to a boil. Remove from the heat.

Add:

2 cups of flour  
2 cups of sugar  
2 eggs  
½ tsp salt  
½ cup of sour cream  
1 tsp. of baking soda

Stir together. Mixture will be thick. Pour in a 10 x 15 prepared pan. Bake 25-30 minutes.

Frosting:

1 stick of butter or oleo  
1/3 cup of milk  
½ cup peanut butter

Bring to a boil. Add: 1 tsp. of vanilla and 1 box of xxx sugar (confectioners). Beat until smooth. Frost hot cake.

Jo Ann Zitterkopf '03

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## Please Note

We are unable to provide you with last months meeting minutes from the Annual Banquet. It seems a masked man with an Indian companion absconded with the meeting notes. They were last seen exiting the building and mounting a white horse. The masked man was heard to say, Hi Ho Silver as the pair vanished into the night. Ed.

(Meeting minutes will be available at May's general membership meeting)

# Growing Fruit Trees: Why Size Matters

When growing fruit trees, you would think bigger is better. If you buy a bigger trees you'll get to enjoy you harvest sooner, right? If you let your tree grow larger, you will get enough fruit to make lots of pies.

Actually. Size does matter when it comes to growing fruit trees. But the truth is that smaller trees are much better. They are easier to care for and they are healthier. Yes, they will produce less fruit, but that fruit will be sweeter and easier to harvest.

So how can you keep your fruit trees compact, productive and healthy? There are two key ways. One is by buying the right trees. The other is by using the correct annual pruning techniques.

## Buying the Right Tree

When you go to the garden center to buy your tree, you don't really have much of a choice. They will have a few fruit tree cultivars and all of those trees will be potted, ready to plant in your yard whenever you are.

When you order fruit trees from a specialist fruit tree nursery, however, it's a completely different experience. You will have a wide range of cultivars to choose from, so you can research and select a tree that will thrive in your conditions. After you choose and order your tree, it will be shipped to you, but not right away. That's because specialist fruit tree nurseries sell their trees "bare root". They dig their trees out of the ground in the early spring and send them to you at that time.

The trees you receive may be a whip — a year-old tree that looks like a tiny twig with roots — or it may be a slightly larger. Two or three year old tree. Either way, it comes to you with its vulnerable bare toots wrapped in moist sawdust or newspaper. The tree, still dormant, can survive like this for only a few days. So after it arrives, your tree must be planted immediately. If you see the buds are starting to burst, it's a sign that planting quickly is essential. If a bare-root tree emerges from dormancy before being planted. It will become stressed and die.

Planting a bare-root tree can feel like a game of "beat the clock", so it is really worth the hassle? The answer is a resounding "Yes". Bare-root fruit trees adapt more readily to their new environment. They grow more quickly once they are in the ground. They are healthier than posted trees. And they are easier to shape into an ideal fruit-supporting structure through cored annual pruning.

## Controlling Tree Size with Correct Annual Pruning

There are so many reasons to keep your fruit tree small. Here are a few of them:

Fruit trees can grow to be taller than houses. Cherry trees are notorious for being vigorous growers, but even apple and pear trees can grow to be huge. And who but the birds can enjoy the fruit at the top of the tree?

Big trees can cause a lot of mess as ladder-fearing gardeners wait until the fruit falls to the ground. By that time it's soft, half rotten and unappealing. Who wants to use squishy bird-pecked or wormy apples in their fruit crumble?

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Big trees are hard to care for. Even if you grow your fruit organically, you do have to spray them from time to time with organic sprays. It's hard to spray a large tree.

All fruit trees need pruning to ensure good air circulation and to give all the branches equal access to light. Pruning is much more difficult to do when you have a really big tree.

If you're interested in large, sweet fruit, rather than smaller fruit that's as hard as a rock, you need to do some hand thinning on your trees. Plucking off some to be baby fruit early in the season so that the remaining fruit has room to grow to full size. Who is going to hand-thin the fruit on the upper branches of your oversized tree?

I could go on and on, but by now you get the picture. Smaller trees are better, and if you keep your tree small — anywhere from 7 to 12 feet tall — you'll have room for other plants your garden too. You might even have room for a couple more fruit trees.

So..... What's the secret? How do you keep your tree small? Here are a couple of options:

Some people control the size by selecting and planting a tree that has been grafted onto dwarfing rootstock. That is certainly one option, but trees grown on dwarfing root stock are often weak and need staking.

Or you can get a book or go online and learn fruit tree pruning skills. Correct pruning helps you create a strong but compact fruit-bearing structure for your tree. It also improves air circulation and ensures that all branches have full access to the sun.

Your pruning adventure starts on the first day you plant your bare-root tree, when you perform a "whip cut", slicing off the top third of the tree to spur vigorous growth and encourage the tree to focus its energy on its root system. Each year after that shape your tree using your hand pruners or loppers. To encourage vigorous growth, you can prune young trees in the early spring while they are dormant.

Once your tree has reached an appropriate size, you may opt for summer pruning. That way, you can reduce the size of the tree or the length of the branches without spurring tons of new growth during the growing season. Your fruit tree will still grow, just not as much. Which is good if you want to keep it small.

### **What If You Already Have a Large Tree?**

If you have a tree that's grown too large, you can bring its size down slowly over a number of years. Each 7 years, you can sagely remove up to 20% of the branches on your tree. If you take off more, you will stress your tree and possibly kill it.

Renovating a larger tree can take four to five years. Ultimately, it's worth it as you already have a tree that's established and producing a harvest for you, whereas newly planted fruit trees can take five years to start producing a harvest.



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## Developing a Relationship

Fruit—tree pruning is very different from pruning native or ornamental trees, and there are some skills you will need to learn. But once you know the theory behind correct pruning, it is easy.

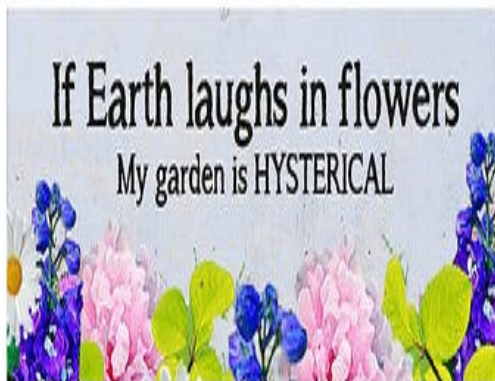


What you will find over time is that as you prune and care for your tree, you will develop a relationship with it. You'll see how it responds to the previous years' cuts. It will teach you how it wants to be shaped and cared for.

For me that is the magical, challenging and enjoyable part of fruit tree care. I hope you will enjoy it too.

Text and photos by Susan Poizner

## SWEET AND FUNNY GARDEN SIGNS





# Crocus



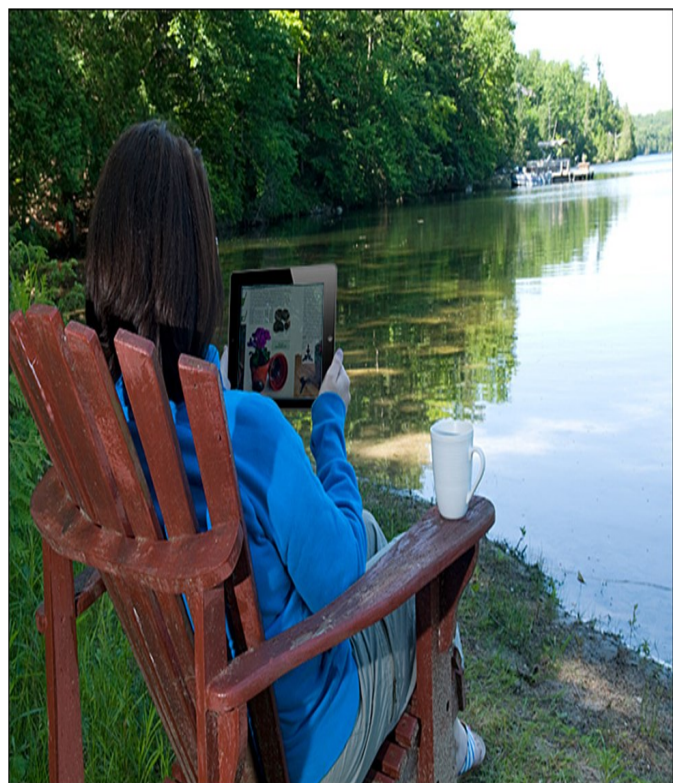
Photo Gita Wright

Text Wikipedia

About 30 of the species are cultivated, including [\*Crocus sativus\*](#) for saffron production. The varieties cultivated for decoration mainly represent five species: *C. vernus*, *C. chrysanthus*, *C. flavus*, *C. sieberi*, and *C. tommasinianus*. Among the first flowers to bloom in spring, crocuses are popular with gardeners. Their flowering time varies from the late winter *C. tommasinianus* to the later large [hybridized](#) and selected Giant "Dutch crocuses" (*C. vernus*). Crocus flowers and leaves are protected from frost by a waxy cuticle; in areas where snow and frost occasionally occur in the early spring, it is not uncommon to see early flowering crocuses blooming through a light late snowfall.

Most crocus species and hybrids should be planted in a sunny position, in gritty (sandy), well-drained soil, although a few prefer shadier sites in moist soil. Some are suitable for naturalizing in grass. The corms should be planted about 3 to 4 cm deep; in heavy soils, a quantity of sharp grit should be worked in to improve drainage.

Some crocuses, especially *C. tommasinianus* and its selected forms and hybrids (such as 'Whitewell Purple' and 'Ruby Giant'), seed prolifically and are ideal for naturalizing. They can, however, become weeds in [rock gardens](#), where they will often appear in the middle of choice, mat-forming alpine plants, and can be difficult to remove.





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**DO NOT PLANT DEEP !** Plant clumps no closer than four feet center to center, individual rhizomes no closer than 24 inches apart. Bearded iris can stay in the original planting spot for 2 to 3 years before the gardener has to dig and divide again so they need the extra space to grow and increase.

If the name of the iris is known, write it with an oil base china marker (available at office supply stores) or label maker tape on a plant marker and place it in the middle of the clump. Narrow Venetian blinds cut into 12" lengths also make inexpensive plant markers. Write the name on the top end & the bottom end of the blind using china marker or label maker, and push the blind into the soil so that only the upper end of the marker is visible. If the name should come off the exposed end, the name will remain clear on the part underground. Making a planting map with location and names of the iris is also a good idea since markers can get lost or displaced during weeding and other garden work.

Water plants deeply to settle them in. Then water only enough to keep the ground moist. The new plants will begin to send out new roots immediately. New leaves will begin growing more slowly at the center of the leaf fan. Old leaves will turn brown and may be pulled off with a sideways tug. Keep the area weeded. Continue watering as noted until the fall/winter rains take over . Too much water or standing water will cause the rhizomes to rot. A drip watering system is best for bearded iris. Overhead watering can lead to leaf spot, a fungal disease that causes circular brown spots on the leaves. To control leaf spot, spray before the first rain with a fungicide formulated for iris leaf spot. A second spraying may be needed in early spring as the weather warms.

In February, when plants begin spring growth, feed each clump with one handful per rhizome of the same complete fertilizer used at planting time. Apply as a side dressing, scratch in, and water –or side dress and scratch in just prior to a natural rain.

At this time keep a sharp eye out for snails and slugs. Hand pick after dark or, for a heavy infestation, review the [UC Pest Note on snails and slugs](#). Fertilize again in the same way after the bloom season is over, approximately in late May. Cut off spent blooms stalks at an angle with a sharp knife or clippers just above the rhizome. Water through the summer for development of larger rhizomes. Keep beds weeded and withered leaves removed from the plants and the beds. Older varieties may have sentimental value because Grandma had them in her yard, or because they were inherited from a good friend – that probably makes it reasonable to grow a clump of each. However, if the idea of having iris bloom in your garden all year long is appealing, or, if the modern, huge, ruffled and laced blossoms are the ones that call your name, go online and search for iris and search for "bearded iris suppliers", you'll find lots more information.

By Philippa Alvis, MG '07  
Santa Clara County Ca

There may be some climate differences but the technic is the same, ED

## 2016 Is the Year of the Carrot

While carrots are one of the top 10 most economically important vegetable crops in the world, they also are one of the most popular vegetables to grow in home gardens - and for good reason.

Carrots are delicious, nutritious, versatile, and with just a little bit of know-how, this root crop is easy to grow.

It is “root” to tell a lie: While Vitamin A that is derived from Beta Carotene found in orange carrots does aid in overall eye health, you won’t be able to have full-fledged night vision from eating an abundance of carrots, as some have reported.

Your skin, however, CAN turn yellow from eating an abundance of carrots! Not to worry though, the yellowing will go away after a few weeks as long as you cut down on the carrot intake.

### History:

The ancestor to the modern day carrot is believed to have originated in Afghanistan and was purple, scrawny, and pungent. Over time, cultivation by Greeks and Romans resulted in roots that were plumper, tastier, and came in shades of purple, red, and black. It wasn’t until the late 16 or early 17th century that the orange, appetizing carrots that we know today were bred by the Dutch in Europe.

### Basic Types:

Carrots (*Daucus carota*) are members of the Apiaceae family, which also includes culinary plants such as anise, celery, coriander (cilantro), dill, and parsnips. They are biennials, meaning that they will flower in the second year of growth, but are typically grown as annuals (grown and harvested in the same year). There are several different carrot types and they are primarily divided up by shape.

### Variety/Series Names:

The following are some of the more well-known types, along with their characteristics and links to NGB members websites for more information on ordering.

**Chantenay** - Conical, triangular shaped roots with broad shoulders and rounded tips. Sweet flavor makes it good for eating fresh.

Varieties include:

Royal Chantenay Red Core Kuroda

**Danvers** - Cylindrical, thick roots that are often used to make carrot juice due to the high water content and low sugar content.

Varieties include:

Danvers Danvers Half Long

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**Imperator** - Long, tapered roots with narrow shoulders. These are typically the carrots you would buy in a plastic bag at the grocery.

Varieties include: Sugarsnax 54 Imperator 58 Yellowbunch

**Miniature/Baby** - Either small round roots (also called Planet-types) or cylindrical and short.

*Myth debunked: Baby carrots that are purchased in a bag at the grocery are actually made from long, skinny carrots that have been cut.*

Varieties include:

Atlas Parisian Adelaide

**Nantes** - Cylindrical, “cigar-shaped” roots that are sweet and crispy.

Varieties include:

Purple Haze (All-America Selection Winner) Nelson

### **Successful How-To-Grow:**

Carrots are easy to grow from seed and perform best when directly sown into a garden bed or patio container. National Garden Bureau Members not only provide great products, but also great growing information.

Here are links to some of their websites that help to explain how to grow carrots:

### **Territorial Seed Company Carrot Growing Guide**

<http://www.territorialseed.com/product/growingguide15>

### **Johnny's Selected Seeds Carrot Growing Guide - 4 Keys to Carrot Culture**

[http://www.johnnysseeds.com/t-carrot-bed-preparation-spacing-weeding-watering.aspx?source=W\\_GrowersLibVegIndex\\_092015](http://www.johnnysseeds.com/t-carrot-bed-preparation-spacing-weeding-watering.aspx?source=W_GrowersLibVegIndex_092015)

### **Burpee's How to Plant and Grow Carrots Video**

<http://www.burpee.com/gardenadvicecenter/vegetables/carrots/how-to-plant-and-grow-carrots/article10646.html>

### **Gardener's Supply Company Grow Carrots In A Grow Bag**

<http://www.gardeners.com/how-to/carrot-grow-bag/7608.html>

*The National Garden Bureau recognizes and thanks Josh Kirschenbaum from PanAmerican Seed as author and contributor to this fact sheet.*

*This fact sheet is provided as an educational service of the National Garden Bureau. There are no limitations on the use. Please credit the National Garden Bureau.*



## 2016 ANNUAL EDUCATIONAL MGAGCM BUS TRIP

We have been overwhelmed by the responses that we are getting for this bus trip on Thursday, July 21, 2016. The cost is \$45.00 and we will be visiting Four Star Proven Winners Display Gardens in Carleton, Mi., then onto the historic town of Tukumseh to enjoy lunch and just a short distance away we will be visiting Hidden Lakes in Tipton, Mi. We will be leaving Flint at 7:30 am and arrive back home by 6:00 pm. The deadline for registration is June 1, 2016. You may download a registration form at our website: [geneseecountymg.org](http://geneseecountymg.org) or you can pick up a form at our membership meetings.

**The Davison Farmers Market starts on May 7, 2016** and will continue to the last Saturday in September from 10:00am-until 2:00pm. Volunteers are needed for each Saturday during this time. To sign up for a Saturday call Alan Grove at 810-922-8776.

The Grand Blanc Farmers Market will begin Sunday, May 15th from 10:00am until 3:00pm. We will be there on May 15th and then the first Sunday of each month thereafter. To volunteer for this project call Beth Fromholz-Davis at 810-288-3253 or Alan Grove at 810-922-8776

**Ask an Master Gardener** will begin Saturday, May 7, 2016 including WoJo's Garden Splendor in Davison, Walkers Nursery in Burton, Bordine's in Grand Blanc and Carlson's Greenhouse in Fenton. If you would like to volunteer at one of these nursery's please call Alan Grove at 810- 922-8776. Volunteer opportunities are Saturdays from 9:00 am-1:00 pm and 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. This project goes thru the end of May.

## DATES TO REMEMBER

**On May 19th, 2016 we will be holding our MGAGCM monthly meeting at the GCCARD building at 605 N. Saginaw St. Flint.** Social time will begin at 5:30 pm and our speaker, Marvin Pettway, will begin at 6:00 pm. Marvin earned both the Bachelor of Science in Forestry and the Master of Forestry degrees from the University of Michigan. He has worked over 40 years in various aspects of grounds maintenance including the last 27 years as the lead arborist for the UM Ann Arbor campus, Marvin will be speaking with Chris Pargoff on Big Tree Move. Detailing how U of M Ann Arbor transplanted the largest, oldest, well known Burr Oak on campus to a new location. Business meeting **will** follow after a short break. May's snack providers are Loretta Ellwood, Christy Jones, and Alan Groves.

**We will be holding our June MGAGCM MEETING ON June 16th, 2016 at WoJo's Garden Splendor at 7360 E Court St. Davison, Mi.** We will be meeting at 5:30 pm for social time and our speaker from WoJo's will begin at 6:00 pm. The presentation will be "Pollinating Plants" and will include non-native perennials and annuals that pollinate. After a short break we will begin our business meeting. This day will also be the first day of our fundraiser. The 2nd day of our fundraiser will be the following Saturday, June 18th. It allows our supporters within the general public an entire day to shop for us and fits in fairly well this year as the Frost Free dates are so late. So plan on coming early and doing some shopping for those plants you can't resist and help our membership out at the same time.

**Bulb Sale** will continue in May with the Hotline hours, Monday, Wednesday and Fridays from 8:30 am– 1:00 pm. Bulbs will be available at our May membership meeting on May 19th and the sale will end that evening. The sale has been very successful this year and we thank all who have purchased bulbs to help in this fundraiser.

**MGAGCM OFFICERS (2015)**

President	<b>Vicki Laurin</b>
810-744-0725	laurinvicki@gmail.com
Vice President	<b>Kay McCullough</b>
810-635-9341	birdieball@aol.com
Secretary	<b>Dick Moldenhauer</b>
810-695-2649	rnold1050@aol.com
Treasurer	<b>Michelle Chockley</b>
810-659-8014	chockley@gmail.com

**THIS NEWSLETTER PREPARED BY:**

Vicki Laurin, laurinvicki@gmail.com. George Rappold, grappocp@att.net, of counsel Ruth Simon .

**CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITES**

MMGA Inc Website at:  
[www.michiganmastergardener.org](http://www.michiganmastergardener.org)

MMGA Inc Facebook Page at:  
[www.facebook.com/MichiganMG](http://www.facebook.com/MichiganMG)

MGAGCM Website at: Genesee County MG.org



**BuuuuzzzzZZZZzzzzzzzz**

**PLANT A BUTTERFLY GARDEN**

**MSU Extension-Genesee**  
 605 N. Saginaw St. Suite 1A  
 Flint, MI 48502  
 (810) 244-8500

**Plant & Pest Hotline:**  
 (810) 244-8548  
 Hours: Monday, Wednesday and Friday  
 from 8:30 am-1:00pm

[geneseeplantpest@anr.msu.edu](mailto:geneseeplantpest@anr.msu.edu)

**Public Office Hours:**  
 8 am - 1 pm Monday through Friday.

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MSU EXTENSION-GENESEE COUNTY  
605 N. Saginaw St.  
Suite 1A  
FLINT, MI 48502  
[www.msue.msu.edu/genesee](http://www.msue.msu.edu/genesee)

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