

over the picket fence



Spring 2025 March, April, May The Mason County Garden Club Quarterly Newsletter (Since 1926-our 99th year)

www.masoncountygardenclub.org

Member: Michigan Garden Clubs, Inc
Central Region and National Garden Clubs, Inc
Club No. 140 – District 5





Thoughts From Our President:

Spring is Here! Or just about. I think that we are all looking forward to spring with sunny skies and warmer weather. This winter has been colder and snowier than past years, with too many gloomy, cloudy days. Welcome spring!

As we prepare our gardens we need to think not just about beautiful flowers but also how we can enhance our environment to provide for our native invertebrates which include insects, such as bees, butterflies, ladybugs etc. There has been an alarming decrease of insects and studies predict that over 40% of insect species are at risk of extinction in the next few decades. Everyone loves Monarch butterflies. Over the last few decades, their overwintering numbers have plummeted to less than 1% of the population size in the 1980's! Why is this? Reasons include climate change, deforestation, pesticides and habitat loss. Some things we can't change but we can eliminate pesticides in our yards and we can restore a bit of habitat loss. How do we do that? We start by eliminating invasive plants in our yards. There are over 1200 invasive plant species in the U.S. and over 700 are still being sold. You may be surprised by some of the invasives in our yards because a large portion of them are still being sold locally. The more popular invasive plants include: English ivy, burning bush, butterfly bush, privet, barberry, Bradford pear (Callery pear), Norway maple and common glossy buckthorn to name just a few. We probably won't be cutting down the large trees such as Norway maple but don't plant any of them. After removing invasive species, plant native ones that supply food and shelter to our native insects. Plant native bushes under the trees. Lots of insects fall to the ground in order to complete their life cycle by burrowing into the ground. Bushes provide shelter so they don't get eaten before they can reproduce. Eliminate a portion of lawn (turf grass is an ecological wasteland) and plant native bushes and flowers. Plant an oak tree. Oaks are a keystone plant and supply food for 452 caterpillar species as well as other insects, mammals and birds. Even though you might not live to see the oak fully grown, you'll be doing a good deed for future generations. According to Dr. Douglas Tallamy oaks can live 900 years. Keystone native plants are vital for the environment and regeneration of native insects. They exert a disproportionately large influence on the health and stability of an ecosystem. As linchpins, they provide essential food and shelter for a diverserange of creatures from the tiniest insects to majestic birds of prey. Dr. Tallamy's research has revealed that just 14% of native plants support 90% of caterpillar species which provide food for the young countless birds. Not all native plants are equal.

By adding keystone native plants to your landscape, you are adding not just beauty but a thriving ecosystem to your yard.

Sharon

(Some statistics taken from "Rebugging the Planet" by Vicki Hurd and "Nature's Best Hope" by Dr. Douglas Tallamy]



March

- 2 Maureen McGowan
- 3 Judy Olson
- 10 Julie Tews
- 30 Jackie Lane

April

- 3 Melanie Bettinger
- 3 Carol Christofferson
- 3 Dianne Miller
- 3 Betty Orton-Cochran
- 8 Mary Ann Ferguson
- 10 Gail Burkhart
- 19 Maureen Myers
- 29 Gloria Merchant

May

- 9 Deb Gundersen
- 10 Gale Martin



Julie's Tips and Tricks:

To-Do List

Spring weather in Michigan can be unpredictable. One nice day and gardeners are tempted to begin clean up and other gardening activities, but it may be too soon. Early activity on damp soil can cause compaction, creating problems later. Wait until soil is loose and friable (crumbles) before starting any activities in the garden. To test soil, grab a handful of soil and squeeze it. If it crumbles, it's time to work in the soil. If it stays in a ball because it's too wet, wait a little longer to venture into the garden or use a soil thermometer to make sure the soil is 50 degrees before you begin working. If you can't work outside, take this opportunity to plan. Review your notes from last gardening season. Start seeds indoors, and decide which plants need transplanting and dividing. Check your tools--sharpen mower blades, pruners, spades and shovels. Use a stiff wire brush to remove any rust on blades and a light machine oil to help prevent future rust. Inspect the wooden handles on your favorite tools. Use sand paper to smooth away any splinters or rough spots and linseed oil to seal the wood. The vibrant yellow of the forsythia flowers are a sure sign of spring. When the forsythias start to bloom, it's time to start applying an organic fertilizer to your beds. Winter protection such as burlap screens, can be removed by mid-April, along with any excessive mulch from the crowns (tops) of perennials and shrubs.

Dividing and Transplanting Perennials:

If you missed the opportunity to divide and transplant your perennials last fall, this can easily be accomplished in early spring. The key is catching the plants before they get too large. Perennials need dividing every few years to keep them looking their best. Dividing helps to rejuvenate and control their size. You'll also create new plants, which can be planted in other areas, shared with a gardening friend, or potted up for a plant exchange or sale. If possible, divide perennials on a cloudy day with rain in the forecast to help reduce plant stress. Even better, divide plants a few days after a soaking rain, or water the plants thoroughly a day or two before dividing. Prepare the perennial bed in advance if you are transplanting them into a new area of your garden. Prepare the soil by adding any soil amendments like compost or manure. To divide a perennial, dig down about four to six inches on the four sides of the plant with a sharp-pointed shovel or spade. Pry underneath the root ball and lift up the clump. Shake or hose off the loose soil and remove any dead leaves or stems. It will be easier to see the root mass before making divisions. Cut any broken roots with a sharp knife or pruning shears. Divide each root ball into several plants. Plant each new division as soon as possible to avoid them drying out. Water thoroughly after planting. The only fertilizer necessary is a root stimulator to help promote healthy roots and reduce transplant shock. To keep weeds away and retain moisture, mulch around the plants with one to two inches of shredded bark. **Have fun, Juls**





Upcoming Mason County Garden Club Events:

March:

Thursday, March 27 – 1:00 p.m. – United Methodist Church - Social Potluck – Welcome back to all our Garden Club members and a special welcome to the newest members of the club. Sara Bolan of the non-profit environmental group (AFFEW) will speak on the U-Dig It Community Garden project.

April:

Thursday, April 24 – 1:00 p.m. – United Methodist Church – Business Meeting and Program – “Hydroponic Gardening” – Jason Rawson, Ludington Farmer’s Market.

May:

Wednesday, May 15 – 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. – Field Trip – Proven Winners – Spring Meadow Nursery, inc. – Grand Haven, MI

Saturday, May 17 – 9:00 a.m. – Petunia Parade Planting Day.

Thursday, May 22 – 1:00 p.m. – United Methodist Church – Business Meeting and Program – “Microplastics in Our Environment” - Paul Bilinski, PhD, Professor of Biology, West Shore Community College.

Saturday, May 31 – 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. – Spring Plant Exchange and White Elephant Sale – Rotary Park, Ludington.

Upcoming Local Events:

March:

March 30 to April 20: - AFFEW Online Native Plant Sale – Garden & Single Species flats, plus individual Quart & Gallon plants may be ordered by visiting affew.org.

April:

Friday, April 25th – 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturday, April 26th – 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. – **Mason-Lake Conservation District Annual Spring Tree Sale Pickup:** Mason County Fairground, 5302 U.S. 10.

Saturday, April 26th: -Earth Day - Each April, AFFEW (A Few Friends for the Environment of the World) hosts an annual Earth Day event in Ludington. The event is held at the Ludington United Methodist Church- 5810 E. Bryant Rd. from 10:30am-4pm. The 2025 theme is “Planet vs. Plastics” and the event includes a variety of speakers, informational booths representing the community and our partners, activities for children, including a live reptile show and a guided hike, and tours of the U Dig It Community Garden located behind the church.

May:

Saturday, May 3rd – 10:00 a.m. – Historic White Pine Village opens for the Season – 1687 S. Lakeshore Drive., Ludington.

Friday, May 16th – 9:00 a.m. –Badger’s first sailing of the season..for reservations call (800) 841-4243.

Saturday, May 24th – Sunday, May 25th – 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. = West Shore Family Craft Show – Rotary Park.

Tuesday, May 27th – Port of Ludington Maritime Museum Open for the Season. 217 S. Lakeshore Dr., Ludington



Local Farmer’s Markets

Ludington: Fridays – 2:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. – May 23rd – September 5th– Legacy Plaza Pavilion.

Manistee: Saturdays – 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 P.M. – May – October – located on Memorial Drive.

Scottville: - Bi-Weekly on Saturday – 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. – May 10th – September 23rd – West Shore Bank parking lot.



Michigan Garden Clubs Upcoming Events

Register Now! *Before it's too late!*

Environmental School

Last day to register is now Friday, March 25th!

Environmental School Course #1

April 7, 9:30am - 5pm - In-person

April 8, 8:30am - 5pm - includes a Nature Discover Field Trip

Course #1 The Living Earth An Overview and Introduction

Michigan State University
W.K. Kellogg Biological Station Conference Center and Bird Sanctuary
3700 E Gull Lake Drive
Hickory Corners, Michigan

Seating will be limited. Overnight accommodations are also available.

Michigan Garden Clubs, Inc.

94th Annual Conference

Haworth Hotel and Conference Center
Holland, MI

SAVE THE DATE!

Conference Registration Opens Monday March 24, 2025

-Accommodations-

Reservations are Available Now!

Haworth Hotel (48 rooms avail at MGC rate until April 27)
Call 616.395.720 (use code 2506-MICHIG)

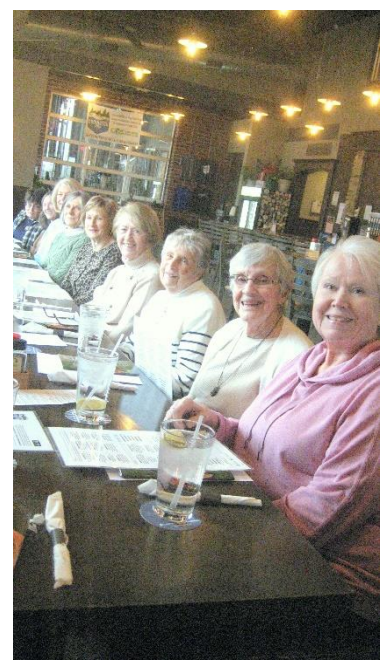
Courtyard Holland Downtown (1 block away) (rooms avail at MGC rate until May 9th) [Click This Link](#) or call 616-581-8500

Holiday Inn Express Holland (3 miles away)
(rooms avail at MGC rate until May 9th) [Click This Link](#) or call 616-581-8500

Look What We Did!

In January and February, those of use who stuck around to brave the worst Winter we have had in a long time, ventured out in the snow and cold to enjoy lunch at Stix Restaurant and Ludington Bay Brewing:





GardernTherapy: In March, the Garden Therapy Committee (Pat Gimble, Deb Gundersen, Betty Orton-Cochran and Diane Davis) met at Ludington Woods to bring some joy to the residents. We helped the ladies create cute Spring wreaths made from paper plates and computer clip-art graphics (provided by Diane Davis). It was a fun project. We will be meeting the second Thursday of the month during March – November at 10:30 a.m. We would love to have you come join us!!



*Live, live, in the here and now
For tomorrow isn't promised
Watch as the meadow fills with daffodils
And the apple blossoms open to the light
Smell the grass and the baking pie
Look up and catch sight of the clouds floating by
Watch the cat lick her paws
And hear the birds sing all their songs
Take off your shoes
Let your feet touch the earth
And live in the here and now*

Trip to Philadelphia Flower Show: Dawn Rollenhagen and Judy Olson attended the Philadelphia Flower show with members of the Michigan Garden Clubs...Here are just a sample of the pictures they took.



The Philadelphia Flower Show was in a huge hall. When you walked in you saw all the huge exhibits by well-known designers. The theme was “Gardens of Tomorrow “ and I must admit I found many to look pretty weird (Judy thought they were creative). but it was interesting how they made everything out of plants—except for the obvious lights. In the middle of the space was a huge actual flower show with hundreds of people who entered horticulture and did designs and botanical arts. Many obviously had greenhouses or something to force spring bulbs early and there were many types of house plants, succulents and orchids. The botanical arts included pressed plant landscape pictures and faces, photography, jewelry, covered boxes with plants and decorated trees. Every kind of design was there. including landscaping an area like at a front door area and designing a big store display window (like Macy’s.) The other end was about 300 vendors -most having something to do with gardening or made from plants. You could buy or make a “crown” of flowers for your head. The other days we spent part of each travel day going to different conservatories that were just awesome! We went to Hershey gardens, Longwood Conservatory and Franklin Conservatory. Think like Meijer gardens but actually bigger in some cases. We had a great time and saw lots of flowers—so welcome at this dreary time of year! **Dawn**



More pictures of the Philadelphia Flower Show:





Thank you!

Dear Members of the Mason County Garden Club,

As members of the Downtown Ludington Board, we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude for your incredible efforts in beautifying our downtown this holiday season. Your dedication and creativity in enhancing the charm and spirit of our community have not gone unnoticed.

The festive greenery and floral touches you provided brought warmth and elegance to our streets, creating a welcoming atmosphere that residents and visitors alike cherished. Your hard work has made a meaningful difference for our small business owners, who thrive in the inviting environment you helped create.

Please know how much we value your contribution to making Downtown Ludington a truly special place during the holidays. Thank you for your commitment to our community and for helping us spread holiday cheer.

With deepest appreciation,

The Downtown Ludington Board

Barbara Miller
Barbara Miller
Barbara Miller
Barbara Miller

Kathleen Anderson
Kathleen Anderson
Kathleen Anderson
Kathleen Anderson



Say Hello to Hummingbirds

Follow the chart for quick solutions to attract and feed hummingbirds.

Want to attract more hummingbirds?

Do you have?

A LARGE GARDEN

LUCKY!

You can go crazy with plants and bushes hummingbirds love—cannas, fuchsia, pentas, hibiscus, salvia and columbine, to name just a few. Plant them all together for a real hummingbird haven.

A SMALL SPACE

DON'T WORRY.

Hummingbirds visit patios and balconies, too, with the right mix of plants. Try phlox, verbena, calibrachoa and petunias, which are all easy-care container plants.

ONE FEEDER

NO PROBLEM.

Since it's the only feeder you've got, make it count. Keep a close eye on it to make sure it's never empty, or the hummingbirds will lose interest. For a little extra impact, hang a basket of red impatiens nearby.

SEVERAL FEEDERS

KEEP 'EM HAPPY.

To encourage several hummingbirds to visit regularly, space feeders out of sight of each other to prevent territorial competition. Try providing perches or even a misting water feature. Watching them fly through the mist is cheery entertainment, too.

I've got hummingbirds, but I need some solutions to these feeder problems.

ANTS OR BEES HAVE TAKEN OVER MY FEEDER.

LET'S GET THIS FIXED.

For bees, make sure your feeder is equipped with bee guards. The best defense against ants is an ant moat, which is essentially just a cup of water hanging above your feeder to keep the ants from reaching the feeding port.

THE SUGAR WATER GOES BAD SO QUICKLY.

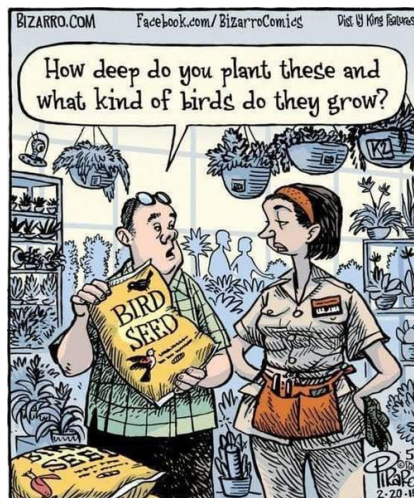
DON'T LET IT SPOIL.

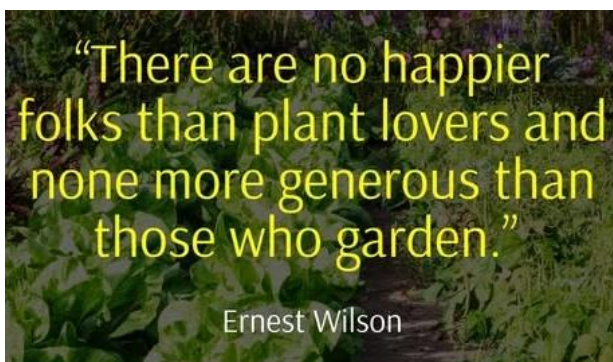
If possible, hang your feeder in the shade. And remember, it's crucial to keep the feeder clean and the sugar water fresh. (Don't forget, the recipe is 4 parts water to 1 part sugar.) If the sugar water is cloudy, it's time to replace it.

MY FEEDER IS SO HARD TO CLEAN.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE!

Some readers swear that an old toothbrush or bottle brush will reach all the crevices of a hummingbird feeder. Or try mixing a tablespoon of uncooked rice and water in the feeder and shaking vigorously. Rinse the feeders well after any cleaning.





GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE



Reimagining the American Lawn

At Cornell Botanic Gardens, researchers are testing sustainable alternatives to turfgrass that nurture native biodiversity

BY JANET MARINELLI

Two years ago, when my husband and I bought a place on New York's Shelter Island, the three-quarter-acre property was a nasty tangle of invasive vines and shrubs. The crew I wanted to restore a strip of coastal forest and create a flowery native meadow. But we also needed some more closely cropped plants around the house where our dogs could run and play.

Grasses, which evolved alongside grazing animals, readily tolerate such trampling as well as mowing and are comfortable to walk on. Yet a water- and energy-guzzling conventional turf lawn with little wildlife value was out of the question.

As luck would have it, I learned about the native lawn demonstration area at Cornell Botanic Gardens in Ithaca, New York (cornellbotanicgardens.org/nativeawn). Dominated by native grasses and studded with dainty wildflowers beloved by pollinators and other wildlife, it sounded like a perfect solution.

Launched in 2009, the project was the brainchild of Krisley Boys, a Cornell horticulturist who was inspired years before when she "met a little blue curly grass growing along a seasonal dirt road" while out hiking. The grass turned out to be *Danthonia spicata*, or poverty oat grass, a North American native commonly found along dirt roads, on hilltops and in power-line cuts, often accompanied by its close relative, *Danthonia conjugens*, or dotted oat grass.

Together, these two native grasses formed the foundation of Cornell's quarter-acre demonstration area, where Boys and her colleagues transformed a nonnative grass and weed lawn into a native lawn that requires minimal mowing, little to no irrigation and no fertilizers or pesticides. Just as important, it provides habitat for a diversity of local plants, pollinators and other invertebrates.

The staff hopes the project will serve as a model that homeowners can replicate. With U.S. lawns collectively



Cornell Botanic Gardens' demonstration lawn (above) is dominated by native oat grasses studded with wildflowers, including bushy aster (top) and wild strawberry (top left, with resin bees), that feed a diversity of pollinators and other wildlife.

occupying three times more land than any other irrigated crop, they say such sustainable alternatives are badly needed.

The two native oat grasses still dominate the demonstration lawn, which originally also included 10 wildflowers, such as wild geranium and moss phlox. Over the years, some species have waxed and waned, or even disappeared, overtaken by new arrivals. Twenty-nine natives have moved in on their own, creating a tapestry of color from early spring through late autumn.

According to Todd Bittner, the botanic gardens' director of natural areas, spring standbys include the common blue violet, which hosts more than two dozen butterfly, beetle and moth, and wild strawberry, a nutritious food source for wildlife. Midsummer brings hairy beard-tongue, with delicate, tubular flowers in shades of lavender that attract an array of pollinators, from long-tongued bees to hummingbirds. "It's the host plant for Baltimore checkerspot caterpillars, too," Bittner says, and tolerates mowing. Asters are autumn highlights, including smooth blue aster, heart-leaved blue aster and bushy aster. Too tall for a typical lawn, asters cut to about 8 inches in late summer take on more horizontal growth habits.

The native plants are drawing in native insects. A recent survey found three times as many families of insects in the native lawn as in an adjoining trail in a lawn, says Bittner. And the native plot harbors a surprisingly diverse community of insect life—not just pollinators but also herbivores, predators and parasitoids occupying different ecological niches.

The staff is now working on what Bittner calls the native lawn 2.0, in which they'll experiment with different site-preparation methods. Eventually he hopes to develop a native lawn seed mix, including oat grasses and wildflowers—that's as easy to find and use as the turfgrass mixes available today at local garden centers. The mix could be tailored to different regions. Poverty oat grass, for example, is a widespread species found in 46 states. Flattened oat grass is an eastern native, while California oat grass, *Danthonia californica*, grows west of the Rocky Mountains.

Bittner and his colleagues have a bird's-eye approach to maintaining the native lawn. They do not struggle to remove what they call "exotic nonnatives," such as white clover, that self-seed as long as the plants provide some benefit to wildlife. They've found that, once established in a year or two, the lawn needs only two to three hours of care per year. Oat grasses are naturally low-growing between 8 and 16 inches tall and slightly taller when in flower—so they require cutting just once or twice annually. Because the lawn should not be mowed lower than 6 to 8 inches, and the blades of traditional lawnmowers can't be set that high, it's best to use an electric string trimmer.

My own lawn, which we seeded last September, is just beginning to fill in. But I'm already anticipating shifting away many days this summer watching bees, butterflies and other wildlife flit through the flowers—and not dealing with the 70 hours of annual drudgery needed to maintain a conventional lawn. ■

Award-winning writer Janet Marinelli lives in New York.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

PLAN BEE

It's time for the lawn to start kicking grass.

BY TOM PHILPOTT

SINCE THE post-World War II rise of suburbia, the great American lawn has beckoned with the promise of a grassy, orderly Eden surrounding a single-family fortress. For just as long, lawns have been sending bees and other pollinating critters the opposite message: Buzz off.

That's because the very essence of a lawn (closely mowed, monoculture, weed-free) leaves little room for the sustenance that pollinators depend on—pollen and nectar from a variety of flowers. Residential landscaping is contributing to an alarming ecological crisis: a steep decline in the health of pollinating animals, whose services provide one-third of the food we eat. They don't just power the agriculture that produces our food; they keep forests, parks, and shrublands humming.

The most far-flung troubled pollinators are bees. In five out of the past seven years, U.S. beekeepers lost at least 10 percent of their colonies, forcing them to scramble to create new hives. Unlike the nonnative honeybees that commercial beekeepers rely on, wild bees, which do the bulk of noncommercial pollinating, don't have the luxury of human management. Twenty years ago, the rusty patched bumblebee was found from flower to flower in 26 states. But its population has plunged by 87 percent, making it the first bumblebee to be listed under the Endangered Species Act. A 2017 report from the Center for Biological Diversity showed that among 1,437 bee species native to North America and Hawaii, nearly a quarter are at risk of extinction. Maria Spivak, professor of entomology at the University of Minnesota, says "bees are dying from thousands of threats." These include pesticides, habitat loss, diseases, and poor nutrition linked to the disappearance of essential flowers on huge swaths of the landscape.

Corn and soybean fields, which cover an area almost twice the size of California, provide little nourishment to pollinators. Farmers shower those crops with harmful insecticides and herbicides, and as numerous studies have shown, the areas with the most intensive agriculture are the ones with the highest pollinator declines.

Rather than provide a respite from the pollinator dystopia found on industrial farms, our lawns perpetuate it. America's lawns cover about 40 million acres, an area roughly equal in size to the state of Wisconsin, and along with gardens, suck up 9 billion gallons of water a day, making ornamental grass by far our biggest irrigated crop. Attaining a perfect green patch often requires a chemical cocktail as toxic as the one used by commercial farmers.

Spivak offers a new vision for the lawn: cut close to the ground and planted with a plethora of colorful, low-lying flowers—like ground plums and birdcage lilies. "We're not talking a 'low' kicking grass go," which would mean encouraging weedy species," she says. "We're talking about intentionally seeding flowering species into turf to diversify the landscape and still maintain the manicured lawn look that so many people like" and that homeowners' associations often require.



At her Bee Lab, Spivak spearheaded a project to see whether sowing flowers with short stalks into turfgrass would turn lawns into bee magnets. Researchers found that turfgrass mixed with Dutch white clover, self-heal, and creeping thyme drew in 61 bee species; grass only plots attracted none. Another benefit of a pollinator-friendly lawn: It seeds just two or three times during the warm months.

Minnesota's Board of Water and Soil Resources, alarmed by pollinator declines, just launched a three-year, \$900,000 pilot program offering to reimburse people up to \$500 if they are willing to add bee-friendly plants to their lawns and gardens. The response has been "overwhelmingly positive" with more than 5,000 applications, says Mary Jahn, the agency's communications coordinator. The Department of Agriculture provides funding for some commodity farmers to replace a sliver of their cropland with native prairie vegetation. Farmers with 10 percent of their land devoted to such "prairie strips" led to a three- and-a-half-fold increase in the number of pollinators on farms, Iowa State University researchers found.

In her landmark 1962 book *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson denounced the wholesale use of insecticides. Carson's contemporary, scientist Lorrie Otto, condemned yards as "sterile" and "happily wasteful." Pollinators as cutting as a mower's blade have proliferated in the decades since, but lawns abide. Spivak and her team come just as busy than, but to adapt them to the needs vital to the entire ecosystem—and our food supply. ■



I hope you have enjoyed this Spring edition of “over the picket fence.” Please continue to help me with future newsletters by submitting ideas, articles, recipes and suggestions. I want to be able to continue with the newsletter, as I feel it is important to be able to communicate in this way and you can be a big part in helping me do so. I’m sure you are, as I am, looking forward to the coming Spring and getting back into your gardens. Also looking forward to the Garden Club year with all the events and activities. Stay safe and healthy and hope to see you soon. **Yours In Gardening....Diane D.**

For More Information, Check Out:

MCGC: www.masoncountygardenclub.org

NGC: www.gardenclub.org

MGC: www.migardenclubs.org

Also check us out on our Facebook Page at Mason County Garden Club

Club Collect

Keep us, O God, ever mindful of nature’s generous bounty. May we always bear in mind it is ours in trust, to protect, to nurture and to enjoy.

Mrs. C.C. Caswell

