



Racine / Kenosha Master Gardener Association

Quarterly Newsletter
December 2020

From The RKMGA President....

First, I have to thank Jayne Herring for taking on the continuation of the RKMGA Newsletter. What better way to keep in touch with the RKMGA members. I also need to thank Denise Anastasio for the Newsletters she published this last year.



Mostly I need to thank all of the RKMGA members for continuing to support the RKMGA in a very trying, depressing, confusing, and scary year. Please let the RKMGA Board members know if there is anything we can do to assist you in your gardening endeavors, or any other endeavors for that matter. We are a community of individuals who volunteer as a passion, as a means to help others, as a means to stay social and healthy.

Hopefully by spring of 2021 the worst of COVID-19 will be behind us. We can do this.

Gardeners are optimists. It should come as no surprise that in stressful times people turn to gardens. The therapy is so primal and so rich.

Please take all precautions as advised by the CDC and stay safe.

Best Regards,

Linda Graeper, RKMGA President

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Important Links and Contacts-RKMGA

Register your volunteer and education hours

<https://volunteers.wimastergardener.org/vms/sec/Login/>

Wisconsin Master Gardner website
Wimastergardener.org

Kenosha-Racine University of
Wisconsin-Division of Extension hub
Kenosha.extension.wisc.edu

Plant Health Advising resource page
go.wisc.edu/planthealthadvising

Key Contacts

Linda Graeper, RKMGA President
lindagraeper@gmail.com

Vijai Pandian, Horticulture Educator
vijaikumar.pandian@wisc.edu

**Any newsletter suggestions,
corrections, and contributions?**

Please email: Jayne Herring at
jdherring@jayneherring.com

VOLUNTEER PROFILE**Betty Robinson, Garden of Giving**

Betty Robinson has enjoyed her work with the Garden of Giving, Racine, for twelve years. "I have a sense of fulfillment from feeding the hungry in our community and I enjoy working with fellow gardening volunteers," says Betty.

This year, the Garden of Giving produced over 6,500 pounds of produce including tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, beans, lettuce, peppers, radishes, broccoli, beets, and cauliflower. The produce is donated to the Racine County Food Bank and they distribute to the local food pantries.



Betty and Karen Wolley are co-leaders of the Master Gardener project and have 12-14 regular volunteers Mondays and Wednesdays. Betty coordinates one day; Karen the other. Betty works an additional prep day each week to ensure the gardens are ready for the volunteers to do their jobs..

Betty points out, "We also get volunteer groups from SALT, Modine and other companies, UW-Parkside Earth Day volunteers and others. It has been more difficult this year, of course, because of COVID." In addition to the virus, other challenges include an aging volunteer base—less easy to do the jobs they had in the past. Theft of vegetables by man and beast were also a problem this year.

"When I became a Master Gardener in 2004, I explored several projects. When the Garden of Giving was started in 2009, following the 2008 recession, I found my niche," says Betty. Betty is grateful for the support (and WATER!) from Lakeside Curative—partner in the project (see next page for Sponsor Profile).

Betty has enjoyed the people she has met. She has valued what she has learned about organic gardening and the importance of high quality soil. The wisdom she would share is the importance of adding compost to enrich the soil. "There are many things we learn along the way, but amending soil with compost is key to a bountiful garden," says Betty.

The Garden of Giving will be looking for additional Master Gardener volunteers this Spring. If you'd like to learn more, please email Betty at J.ROBINSON-SKIER@SBCGLOBAL.NET.



Please nominate a volunteer for YOUR project so we can learn more about our fabulous Master Gardeners and the projects in which they volunteer. Contact Jayne or Linda (Contact info on cover page)

SPONSOR PROFILE**Lakeside Curative Services, Garden of Giving**

Lakeside Curative Services (LCS) is the sponsor of Racine's Garden of Giving. The garden is located toward the back of their property at 2503 Lincolnwood Court.

Betty Robinson, co-leader of the Garden of Giving Master Gardener project, says, "Lakeside Curative provides support to the project—most importantly, WATER." The Garden of Giving occupies roughly one-third of the sizable back yard of the LCS property.



Mary Beth Popchock, director of LCS, says, "The board and staff is very supportive of hosting the Garden of Giving. The increased water utility bill is a small price to pay for helping to feed the needy. We feel it is a way of giving back to the community. We appreciate all the work the Master Gardener volunteers perform." The Master Gardener volunteers are also gaining a greater understanding of the work of LCS and of persons with various disabilities.

LCS is a non-profit organization that provides vocational rehabilitation services and opportunities for Racine and Kenosha area citizens with disabilities. LCS believes in work. It is a place where vocational rehabilitation participants are equipped for success; a place where an individual's vocational strengths are identified and developed. Participants are assisted in reaching their highest employment potential. Whether in competitive employment or working for LCS, the organization's goal is to supply jobs to workers with disabilities.

NEW!!**RKMGA Poll—Prizes for your answers**

Let's share our thoughts about our love of gardening with each other! Each newsletter will feature a fun question (NOT a factual quiz!) for you to answer by following a link to a Google form. Submit your answer. The newsletter editor will report some or all of your answers in the following newsletter so you can see what your fellow gardeners are thinking.

AND your efforts will be rewarded. The editor (and only the editor) can see the order in which your answers were submitted. Each time several numbers will be chosen upfront as winners.

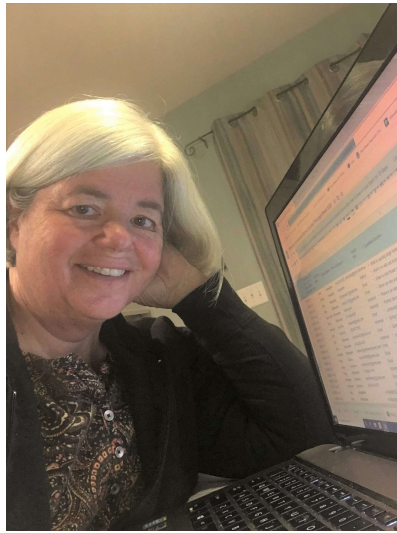
For this inaugural newsletter, you are being asked to complete this statement... "As a gardener, we often say in Fall...."NEXT year I will....."

Complete YOUR sentence here <https://forms.gle/QLzKrH56a3iy1Qd6A>

If you are the 5th, 11th, 17th or 25th response, you will win a \$10 Stein's gift card.

PROJECT UPDATE

Horticulture Help Line: We need you in 2021



Denise Anastasio online

The peak season for the Kenosha/ Racine/ Milwaukee Horticulture Helpline is over and we have been reflecting on this crazy season and planning for how we can make 2021 even better. And YOU might be just the person to help us meet the needs of those looking to the Master Gardeners for answers to their gardening questions.

What we accomplished this year is a shared system among Racine, Kenosha and Milwaukee county Plant Health Advising volunteers. While it took a few months to work out the kinks in this COVID-19 world, we are now ready to integrate more volunteers into the program and hope you will help.

Some background: About a year ago four MGVs from Racine, Kenosha and Milwaukee counties started meeting with Vijai Pandian, Horticulture extension educator, to plan for combining the horticulture helplines from the three counties into one integrated regional system. The separate phone numbers and emails of the three helplines were discontinued. A new combined system allowed volunteers from the three counties access to a single email inbox and a single phone message system. This means that when a county is responsible for “covering” the helpline during a specific day of the week that their inquiries might be coming from any of the three counties – or other places in Wisconsin – even other places in the U.S.! In 2020 we answered almost 800 inquiries, including at least 8 from other states.

The initial plan was to have volunteers work from their own county offices on their assigned days but the pandemic ended that plan, at least temporarily. Volunteers now work from home and are able to access the emails and phone messages remotely.

Our challenges included learning new technology when we couldn't physically be together for training. But we persisted and learned how to access voice messages that turn into emails and recording our inquiries on a shared document located on Google docs so we can access it from our homes and keep it updated.

Another challenge was not being able to physically answer the phone (or in person) when it rang. Vijai set up the system so the phone rings in the appropriate office depending on the day of the week; however, none of us were physically there to answer because of the pandemic. So the voice-mails get turned into emails and we have to return the calls instead of answering when they ring. But it all got worked out eventually.

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Horticulture Help Line...continued

But perhaps the biggest challenge we face now is integrating more Master Gardener Volunteers into the Helpline. The four coordinators worked with a few other MGVs during this season but we struggled with how to coordinate it all remotely. There are now more of us “seasoned” in the challenges of the virtual system and can better support new volunteers. We hope you’ll be interested in joining us. If you are, **email me at denise.anastasio@gmail.com to find out more.** The MGV coordinators from Racine and Kenosha include George Toshner, Maggie Pisani, and Denise Anastasio. Susan Taylor represents Milwaukee County. Combining the three county helplines into one regional system has been a challenge and the pandemic threw another curve into the plans, but we have been able to respond to the inquiries of the public through this new regional system. Please consider joining us in April.

BOOK REPORT**Read a Good Book Lately? Tell Us About It**

As Master Gardeners, of course our major source of credible information is the University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension or other university-researched information.

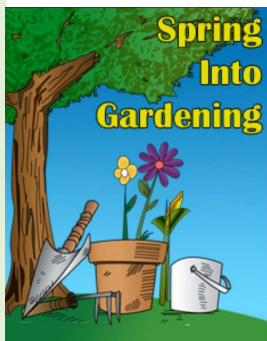
But we always love a good ol’ gardening book! You might have a favorite one you’ve referred to for years or perhaps a new find that does a deep dive into a concept or area of interest.



We’d like to hear about that book from you.

Could you please give us the book’s name, author, publisher if possible and a paragraph (or a few) about why you found it valuable. Please email your thoughts to the newsletter editor: Jayne Herring at jdherring@jayneherring.com

We’ll feature a few books in each of the future newsletters.



Spring Into Gardening To Go Virtual in 2021.

Story on Page 9

FROM OUR HORTICULTURE EDUCATOR: Vijai Pandian

Interesting picks from the AAS trial garden

Dragon's Egg Cucumber – A beauty of its kind

One of the outstanding varieties in our trial garden this year is a cute little cucumber called "Dragon's Egg". Its whitish green skin with egg shape size is unique compared to other cucumber varieties. This heirloom variety originates from Croatia and has a mild sweet & salty taste, with watery and fleshy seeds. The fruit skin is slightly thicker and is less bitter even during dry periods when the vines are wilted.

Dragon's egg is very vigorous in its growth and produces copious blossoms within 30 - 45 days after germination. The fruit weighs about 0.4 lbs on average and is about 4-5 inches long. In our trial garden, Dragon's egg yielded about 6.87 lbs per plant. Best for fresh consumption and tabletop decoration.



Tomato Apple Yellow – 2020 AAS Winner

An indeterminate F1 cherry tomato, Apple Yellow is well known for its clusters of small pear shaped yellow fruit with sweet and meaty flesh. Its vigorous vines produce clusters of fruits in its every axil until the cold weather in October puts an end to it. The plant did not show any symptoms of early blight and Septoria infection and seems to be resistant to fruit crack as well. Apple yellow is one of the favorite snacks for visitors who walk by our garden.

Galeux d' Eysines Pumpkin – An Eye Catching Ornamental Pumpkin



This French heirloom variety has an interesting warty appearance on its beautiful creamy salmon skin. The fruits are medium in size with an average weight of 10 lbs per fruit. Its long, vigorous vine produces large leaves that can cover the ground space in a matter of a few days. With 95 days to maturity, a single vine can yield about 2 fruits. In our trial garden, this variety seems to be highly susceptible to squash vine borer, however its vigorous nature seems to overcome the effect of the borer attack.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: from educational presentations

Designing a 4-Season Garden by Mark Dwyer



As we approach what many consider to be the DEAD season of Wisconsin Gardening, Mark Dwyer explained how to offer year-round interest. Dwyer was the October presenter to the RKMGA membership meeting (via Zoom, of course).

Dwyer, now an independent consultant—Landscape Prescriptions by Mark Dwyer—offered the premise

that we can offer 365 days of garden interest through thoughtful design that is also functional.

There are many moving parts to consider in a 4-season landscape plan—ones that go beyond ensuring progressive bloom times. The primary categories of consideration include function, structure, existing setting, style, maintenance and budget. He urged gardeners to ensure a woody framework within the plan as well as hardscaping.

He reminded gardeners that the principles of design include repetition, variety, balance, accent plants, scale, and sequence. Dwyer offered examples of conifers that assist with winter interest and contrast with summer blooms. He also pointed out the interest foliage plants (or the foliage of flowering plants) can provide through great texture and contrast.

Dwyer offered the RKMGA audience several tips for each season to create and manage the all-season garden .

Mark Dwyer can be contacted at mcdwyer@zoho.com. His website is www.landscapeprescriptionsmd.com

RKMGA Monthly Educational Presentations: STATUS

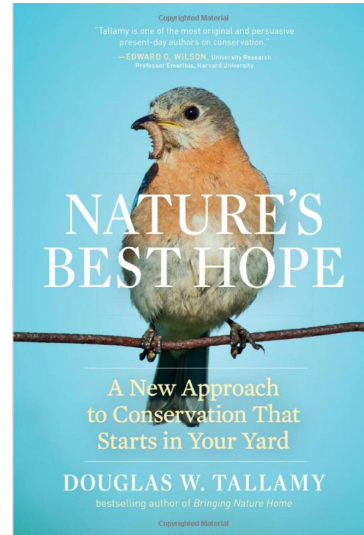
Leon Potter and Nancy Janel will continue to seek informative presentations for the monthly RKMGA meetings via Zoom. They are reaching out to potential speakers to find those amenable to presenting via the technology.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: from educational presentations

Bringing Nature Home: Doug Tallamy

The importance of incorporating the right native plants into our personal property—whether measured in acres or square feet—was driven home through startling statistics and photographs in this 90-minute presentation by Doug Tallamy, University of Delaware. The free presentation was sponsored by Wild Ones and delivered via Zoom through the Fremont Public Library, Mundelein, IL. It was promoted as the RKMGA November educational presentation.

Tallamy discussed the special relationships between plants, insects, animals which eat insects, and, ultimately, animals which eat THOSE animals. His primary research was focused on sustaining and encouraging bird populations and it begins with providing a desired food source.



Doug Tallamy is author and co-author of several books linking your garden with the environment

A quick summary of the specialized relationship/food web:

- Birds eat many things, caterpillars being a prime source of protein for feeding their young**
- Caterpillars are a large, soft source of protein
- Plant leaves are bitter and toxic to caterpillars
- Each type of caterpillar has evolved to be able to eat a selected single type or very few leaf sources
- Since it takes hundreds of years to evolve, removing the selected native leaf type and substituting a “new” non-native plant takes away the food source for the caterpillar AND subsequently for the bird.
- To reverse the loss of caterpillars/birds, one must choose native plantings found to be most attractive to the greatest variety of caterpillars.

**In one study the bird parents fed a nest of three baby chickadees between 390 and 570 caterpillars each day. Since it has also been determined that the birds do their harvesting of caterpillars within 50 meters of their nest, to keep Chickadees close to your property, it must contain native plants attractive to caterpillars.

Other interesting points: 5% of the native plants provide 75% of the food driving the food web. These plants are known as Keystone plants. They are food sources for the greatest number of caterpillar and insect species. This National Wildlife Federation tool can assist you in identifying the keystone plants for your zip code

Nwf.org/NativePlantFinder

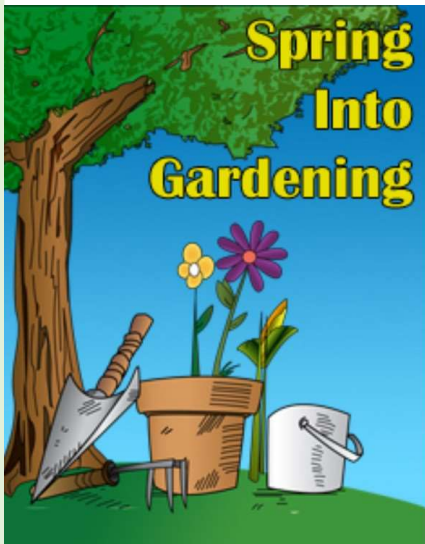
Enter your zip code and select a plant. It will tell you what it attracts.

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Tallamy Presentation...continued

Tallamy specifically called out Oaks, Blueberries, Viburnum, and Black Cherry as keystones. He indicated that the majority of keystone natives are trees. However he offered encouragement to city dwellers with small yards that even planting some potted natives on a balcony is beneficial. We each have a responsibility to save biodiversity wherever we live.

Doug Tallamy is a professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, where he has authored 95 research publications and has taught insect related courses for 40 years. His book Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens was published by Timber Press in 2007 and was awarded the 2008 Silver Medal by the Garden Writers' Association. The Living Landscape, co-authored with Rick Darke, was published in 2014. Doug's new book 'Nature's Best Hope' was published by Timber Press in February 2020.



2021 Spring Into Gardening

Goes Virtual

The annual Spring into Gardening educational event produced by University of Wisconsin-Madison Master Gardener program for Kenosha and Racine counties will move to a virtual format this spring.

Over four Saturday mornings in March, eight one-hour sessions will be offered via Zoom. The dates are March 6, 13, 20 and 27. Sessions on each of the Saturdays will begin at 9:30 and at 10:45. A brochure confirming the speakers and topics will be issued later in December.

Some of the topics include: Seed starting, Top 10 Annuals for Container Gardening, Perennials for all Seasons, as well as sessions on lawn care, fruits, shrubs, and more.

Registration opens January 4, 2021 and closes March 1. Early Bird registration (before January 29th) will be \$20 for ALL sessions. After that date, registration will cost \$25.

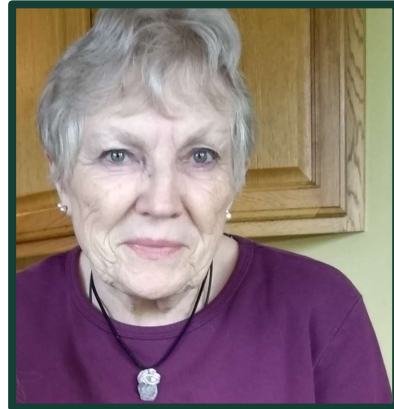
Watch your email for the brochure to be sent by Vijai Pandian.

Nancy's News: from WIMGA and state Master Gardeners

First of all, I want to let you know that 2021 will be here soon (as if you didn't know, duh).

We are officially moving to a calendar year for reporting beginning January 1

We will begin a new year and to close out this year I'd like you to update your education and volunteer hours in the ORS. Please be sure you give yourself education credit for all the monthly programs that Leon & I set up this year. If you attended zoom classes on gardening, include those. **Put those puppies in and get credit!** You can just put in one lump sum number if you wish or do it by category (association education programs, zoom gardening programs, etc).



We are currently working on ways to recognize our volunteer efforts at the state and local level. One thing I want to start is a 'Volunteer Spotlight'. I ask that you fellow MG's nominate someone you work with on a project to send me an email naming that person & just a few lines why you think they are special. Is it community impact or work with a fragile community?

At the WIMGA annual meeting Dec 3rd the updated bylaws were approved (with some minor corrections). Remember, we as an association have to follow their lead in our local bylaws; however, we have a deadline of Dec 31, 2021 to get this done. WIMGA will provide a guidance document for local associations to us. That also applies to our IRS recognition as a non-profit.

Mike Maddox, Master Gardener Outreach Manager reported at the meeting that there will still be some COVID-related restrictions in place, but the 24-hour volunteer requirement will be in place in 2021. Volunteers will again be asked to electronically sign into the QRS (volunteer hour recording system), including the required documents indicating your involvement in Master Gardeners.

It will be a busy year for all. Best wishes for a great December and safe holidays.

Nancy Jahnel-Barnes

WIMGA Website: www.wimga.org

The next scheduled newsletter will be published early April. Please send suggestions or story submissions to Jayne at jdherring@jayneherring.com

