

December 2015

Green Thumb Prints



Newsletter of the Hancock County
Master Gardener Volunteers

Gardening is our Passion . . . Education is our Purpose

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Why Onions Fail
- Flower of the Month—African Violet
- Air Plants
- Reminders, Chairpersons list, etc.



Dates to Remember!



Wednesday, December 2: Wreath Making Workshop, 6:00—8:00, Hancock County Library. Arrive at library early.

Sunday, December 6: Wreath Making Workshop, 2:00—4:00, Hancock County Library. Arrive at library early.

Monday, December 7: Wreath Making Workshop, 6:00—8:00, Hancock County Library. Arrive at library early.

Wednesday, December 9: Wreath Making Workshop, 6:00—8:00, Hancock County Library. Arrive at library early.

Thursday, December 17: MGV Christmas Potluck, 6:00 p.m., OSU Extension.

Thursday, December 25:
Merry Christmas.



Coordinator's Corner

By Bill Jones

As we wrap up the 2015 gardening year, please remember that December is when we raise most of the revenue we need to support our program each year. Please plan to help at one or more of our 5 wreath classes with your presence as well as your greens and accent materials.

The wreath classes are being held on Monday, November 30 at 6:30 at the 50 North Center and at the Library on December 2 (Wed.) at 6:00 PM, December 6 (Sun.) 2:00 PM, December 7 (Mon.) at 6:00 PM, & December 9 (Tues.) at 6:00 PM.

Thanks to Ann Woolum for her interesting November article in the Courier on Pumpkins. Cheryl Miller will have our December 19 article.

Remember we will not have a regular meeting in January and since our MGV Training Classes begin on Feb. 2 and will run through March, we will not have any Brown-bag training during those two

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Coordinator's Corner — Continued

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months. Come to the training for education hours, instead. We have determined that the classes will cost \$150.00 for the new trainees. We need to add some new MGVs since our roster will likely be reduced by at least 8 due to inactivity.

We have agreed that the presentations made at the Library have been poorly attended and as a result we will not be providing those classes in 2016. We will explore providing similar training through the 50 North (formerly the Senior Center) Center.

Noreen Walters will be organizing an event at the Library on January 16 from 9:30 AM – 1:00 PM where we can tell our story and encourage people to participate in our MGV Training. Your help with this event is needed.

If you have an interest in being a part of the statewide "Ask a Master Gardener" program this next year, please let me know by December 15. You will be required to take some training prior to becoming active in the program.

Please try to have your 2015 volunteer hours in to Linda Dyar by December 24, if possible. Your hours must be put into the state VMS system by the end of the year. If we don't get your hours into this system on time, you can't be considered an active member.

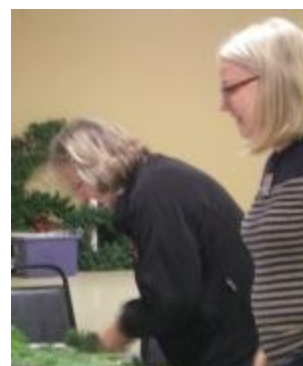
Our next social event is the Christmas Potluck on December 17 at 6:00 PM at the OSUE Office. Bring a dish (soup, salad, sandwiches, desserts, etc.) to share with others. Bring your spouse or friend, also.

As we plan our 2016 gardens, let's consider doing something new or raising something new to increase our gardening experience. We can then share these experiences with the rest of the group and help all of us to grow horticulturally.

***Have a Merry Christmas and a
successful New Year.***

Wreath Making Class At 50 North (formerly Senior Citizen Center)

Thanks to Marilynn Beltz for chairing this adventure! And many thanks to all her helpers!



2016 Master Gardener Volunteer Chairpersons

Volunteer Coordinator	Bill Jones
President	Marilynn Beltz
Vice President	Noreen Walters
Secretary	Open—volunteer needed
Treasurer	Lauri Inkrott
Membership	Linda Dyar
Speakers Bureau	Open—volunteer needed
Newsletter	Kay Sidaway
Facebook	Karl Farwig / Cathy Grossman
Courier Articles	Bill Jones
Advanced Training/Seminars/Brown Bag	Lauri Inkrott
Field Trips	Lauri Inkrott, Gina Gilliland
Public Library/Media Liaison	Noreen Walters
MGV Apparel	Bill Jones
Refreshments	Barb Sherman
MGV Communication	Laurie Inkrott
Leisure Living Show	Marilynn Beltz
Recognition Banquet	Marilynn Beltz, Bill Jones
Let's Go Gardening	Pam McCloud
Safety Fair / Danger Zone	Noreen Walter
Spring Plant Exchange	Bill Jones
Front & Side Garden Maintenance	Cheryl Miller, Marty Davis, Cathy Grossman, Sharon Hammer Baker
Community Gardens/Hunger Initiative	Karl & Lynn Farwig / Ann Woolum
Summer Picnic	Christa Gupta
Fair Booth	Marilynn Beltz, Bill Jones, Noreen Walters
Wreath Classes	Cathy Grossman, Marilyn Beltz
Christmas Potluck	Marjorie Miller, Marilyn Beltz
Mugs of Joy	Pam McCloud, Linda Laux, Anita Lanning



HO! HO! HO!

Until next year — The Community Gardens have been put to bed.

Below shows Gene Barker plowing the garden. The plowing will help to reduce the weeds and diseases next year and will help to reduce the compaction that has developed over the past few years.

Karl and Lynn and all who helped with the Community Gardens have done such a great job of taking care of the garden and were instrumental in getting the plowing done. Thanks and congratulations for such a wonderful teaching garden this year and for the opportunity to be of help to so many other gardeners. We are very appreciative all of the good comments that were given to the Master Gardener Volunteers.



The Mystery of Mistletoe

Most folks think of mistletoe as an excuse for smooching around the holiday, and today, there probably aren't too many people who have actually seen anything but plastic mistletoe! But, in fact, there is a real plant that is the true mistletoe. Well, actually, several types of mistletoe exist, including American Mistletoe and European Mistletoe. These two are different, but related, species of parasitic shrubs. Both have small, leathery leaves and translucent, white berries.

American Mistletoe, *Phoradendron sp.*, can be found hanging around trees from New Jersey to Florida and west to southern Illinois and Texas. Though you can sometimes purchase seed of the American Mistletoe, it is generally not successful in cultivation.

Though these plants do have chlorophyll, as parasites they meet their nutritional needs by tapping into the flow of water and minerals of other plants, particularly trees, such as apple, hawthorn, linden and oak. The seeds actually germinate on the host plant and tap in immediately.

It may be great fun to catch the object of your affection under the mistletoe, but both the berries and foliage can cause severe digestive upset if eaten and in rare instances may be fatal. Now that could explain why plastic mistletoe has become so popular!

Source: purdue.hort.edu

Why our onions fail?

This information is from an excellent article in Fine Gardening magazine on growing onions. It is summarized here, but if you want more information, go to www.finegardening.com/secret-big-homegrown-onions. You will find that the article tells it all – about onions.

Did you ever wonder why our onion plants often fail to produce the large firm bulbs we all long for, and they are susceptible to a host of diseases. Knowing a few simple facts could make a big difference in your harvest.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION--

It all starts with where you live. That determines the varieties you should grow and whether you should start your crop with seeds, sets, or transplants. **LATITUDE** dictates the varieties you can grow.

There are two growing periods in the life of an onion. The first growing period is the **growth of the leaves**. Each leaf eventually produces an onion ring, or layer. The larger the leaf, the larger the ring will be. The perfect onion has 13 rings, so the goal is to create 13 leaves before the onion starts the second stage of its growing cycle by transferring the carbohydrates that are in the leaves to the rings of the onion (**bulbing**). Once the bulbing process begins, no more leaves are created. Because the key to producing a large onion bulb is to grow healthy and large foliage, there are critical steps that need to be followed to achieve numerous, healthy, and large leaves.

The first is to select the appropriate onion variety for your area. Onions are classified as short-, intermediate-, or long-day types according to the length of daylight hours required for bulbing to begin. The goal is to pick a variety that gives you as long as possible to grow as many large leaves prior to bulbing. The variety, however, must not require so many hours of day length that your area will not reach the bulbing threshold needed to trigger the start of the bulbing process.

In the Northern Hemisphere, the farther you are from



the equator, the longer the days will be during the summer. Therefore, the period for creating foliage is longer. Short-day onions start the bulbing process when the day length reaches 10 to 12 hours. In the southern states, short-day onions are grown during the winter and early-spring months. Commercial growers in Georgia and South Texas plant the onions in November, and the onions grow leaves during the shorter days of the winter months. Growers in the northern states can't plant in fall or early winter because the ground is too cold to generate growth. By the time they could plant in spring, the short day onions wouldn't have enough days to generate enough foliage before the 10- to 12-hour-day length trigger is met.

Intermediate-day onions are some of the most widely adapted onions because they start bulbing when the day length reaches 12 to 14 hours. Almost all areas of the country reach that range of day length. In the South, intermediate-day onions are planted about a month later than short-day varieties and are harvested about a month later. In the northern states, there is adequate time for intermediate-day onions to produce at least 10 to 12 leaves before the bulbing process begins. Long-day onion varieties start bulbing when the day length reaches 14 to 16 hours. If you plant a long-day onion in the South, it will just keep making leaves and never start the bulbing process.

SHOULD YOU GROW SEEDS, SETS, OR TRANSPLANTS?

Growing onions from seed is the least expensive method and offers the most options. To achieve large

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Why our onions fail? — Continued

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bulbs, these seeds are usually planted in a greenhouse in the winter months to produce transplants that can be planted outdoors in spring.

Onion sets are produced by commercial growers by planting seeds and letting the onions produce a small bulb. The bulbs are stored over winter and sold to gardeners to plant in their gardens in spring. Almost all onions sold as sets are extremely-long-day varieties, and when planted in short- or intermediate-day areas, they will produce only a green onion. Sets have the advantage of being easy to plant and to get established because the bulbs have a large reservoir of carbohydrates to use to get started.

Onion transplants are plants that are started by commercial growers as seeds in winter, pulled when they have four or five leaves, and shipped at the appropriate time for planting. The seeds can be started in a greenhouse or are field-grown by onion plant growers in southern states.

Any variety of onion that is grown from a seed, set, or transplant will start the bulbing process at approximately the same time. For onion production in short- and intermediate-day areas, the two options are from seed or transplants because long day sets generally won't produce large bulbs.

Because you can plant the transplants that have a four- or five-leaf head start over seeds at the same time that you can plant seeds, transplants generally start the bulbing process with four or five more leaves than seed-grown onions. In this case, these transplants will have four to five more rings, which means up to a 2-inch-diameter larger bulb. For long-day areas, sets or transplants will produce large bulbs as long as the correct variety is planted.

Purchasing the right onion variety for your area is the most crucial part of growing onions. If your source is offering the wrong varieties for your area, switch to a merchant who is concerned about your results and not about just selling you a product.

Once you've selected the onion variety that's right



for you and have purchased the seeds, sets, or transplants, it's time to get them into the ground. Onions can be sown, set, or transplanted approximately six weeks prior to the last average frost date in your area. Here's what you need to know about caring for your future crop:

FERTILIZING

Onions need phosphorus and potassium for root development during the first two to three weeks after planting. Just prior to planting, apply a balanced fertilizer, such as 10-20-10, close to where the onions will be planted. Three weeks after planting, the root system will be established, and a biweekly feeding of a nitrogen-heavy fertilizer, like 21-0-0, will keep the foliage growing and a deep green color. At this point, a new leaf will emerge every two to three weeks. Once the transfer of carbohydrates, or bulbing, begins (you'll see the soil begin to crack around where the bulb is forming), the growing cycle is complete. No further application of fertilizer is required.

WATERING

Once the foliage starts growing, it must be kept healthy and disease-free. Almost all foliage diseases are caused by leaf wetness. Overhead watering is the worst way to irrigate because, every time that the leaves get wet, fungal and bacterial spores attach to the leaves. Use, instead, drip irrigation or soaker hoses. Onions do well with consistent moisture but are prone to rot if the soil is overly wet. It is important that your irrigation system applies water uniformly, preferably to a depth of 1 to 2 inches of water a week until bulbing and then 3 to 4 inches per week during bulbing. mulch to maintain moisture and to control weeds, but remove the mulch when

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Why our onions fail? — Continued

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bulbing begins to help cure the bulbs.

PREVENTING DISEASE

Chances are that bacterial and fungal spores will appear at some point during the growing cycle, especially during a particularly rainy season. The key is to keep the spores from multiplying and spreading. Be proactive by applying a biweekly protective fungicidal spray to the foliage throughout the onion's growing cycle. If you don't want to use synthetic fungicides, consider organic options, like oxidate and copper. If you don't spray and disease takes hold, it will transfer to the rings on the inside of the onion and cause decay in storage.

HARVESTING AND CURING

When the neck of the onion can no longer support the weight of the foliage, the top will fall over, indicating that the onion is reaching maturity. It's now time to harvest and cure the onions. A properly cured onion begins with a dry root system. Remove the bulbs from the soil, and lay them out in rows to dry in a location exposed to breezes. If this spot is in full sun, cover each onion bulb with the next onion's foliage to prevent sunburn until the onion has a nice dry outside leaf. When the neck is completely dry (as revealed when rubbed between your thumb and forefinger), clip off the top of the foliage approximately 1 inch above the bulb and trim the roots. This will prevent the bulb from decaying or sprouting during storage.

What will we do? No gardening?

What's the best thing to do as we face a dreary winter with no outside gardening opportunities? Read gardening books that have gathered dust over the summer. Drool over seed catalogs. Visit on-line gardening sites. Attend gardening seminars. And attend/assist with the new MGVC classes on Feb. 2–March 22.

A few winter reminders:

- When ice forms on tree and shrub branches, don't try to break it off -- you'll risk breaking branches. It's best to let the ice melt naturally.
- When snow accumulates on trees and shrubs, remove it with gentle upsweeping motions. Don't bang on branches; frozen branches are more likely to snap and break.
- Avoid heaping roadside snow onto planting areas; it's most likely full of road salt. Minimize traffic on a frozen lawn to reduce winter damage.
- Purchase ice-melting products early in the season. Investigate what's available in your area. Many products contain chloride (salt). Sodium chloride- and calcium chloride-based products damage plants more than potassium-based choices. Pet-friendly ice melt won't harm plants. Maybe forget melting ice; but focus on creating traction. Use wood ashes, sand, or non-clumping kitty litter. However, take steps to ensure material won't be tracked into your home on shoes and paws. Sand can destroy wood floors, and ashes make a mighty mess. Don't use fertilizer to melt ice. This creates nitrogen runoff issues that could damage local bodies of water.
- Avoid storing pesticides where they'll freeze. Some materials cannot withstand cold temperatures and will become ineffective. If odor is an issue, store in tightly sealed containers.
- Don't forget to stock up on birdseed and keep those feeders full this winter.
- Place Christmas trees away from fireplaces, radiators, heat vents and anything else that could dry the needles. Keep your Christmas tree well watered from the time it is brought home until it is discarded.
- Drain the fuel tank of the lawn mower or tiller before putting the machine away for the winter.
- Check fruits, vegetables, corms and tubers that you have in storage. Sort out any that show signs of disease and dispose of them.

Wrap It Up, Please!



Have you ever watched in horror as shoppers steered their carts full of holiday gift plants through gusty winds and miserably cold temperatures only to put these frigid plant victims into icy-cold automobiles. How many of these plants would even make it to their intended recipients? And how long would they last if they did make it that far?

Plants make great gifts, but only if the plant has a chance to be enjoyed by the recipient! During cold weather even the healthiest plant can be damaged during delivery. Cold and wind exposure for as short a time as it takes to walk to your car can damage some plants.

If you make your purchase from a florist or other supplier, be sure the salesperson wraps your purchase in floral wrapping paper to protect it from cold temperatures and the wind. Get the plant from the store to your car as quickly as possible. Preheat the car beforehand to prevent further chilling injury. Plants left in an unheated car can be injured or killed quickly, so drop the plants off at home before

running other errands. If the plant must be in cold air for any length of time, insulate it by placing it in a box with several layers of newspaper bundled around the tops as well as around the plant's container. Packing plants in boxes with newspaper also will help protect them from tipping over. Besides breaking stems and leaves, tipping often causes soil to spill from the pot, breaking roots along the way.

At home, get the plants back to room temperature as soon as possible, and remove the wrap for good air circulation. Keep plants protected from both warm and cold drafts. Place the plants away from exterior doorways and heating vents. Most plants, particularly those in flower, prefer a moderately cool location, such as 60-70 degrees F during the day and a little cooler at night.

Bright light also is important for most plants. Light will be brightest near a window, but keep leaves from direct contact with cold window glass. Leaves in direct contact with cold panes can be injured, and the water vapor they transpire may condense on the glass to form ice. The plant's leaves then may freeze to the glass.

Check the soil for dryness, as plants that have been on display for a bit may be in need of watering immediately. Water thoroughly enough to allow some excess water to come through the drainage holes at the bottom.

Giving your gift plants a bit of tender care is a small investment in many years of enjoyment.

Source: purdue.hort.edu

Rodent Problem?

Rodents of various kinds may try to nibble on the tender bark of young shrubs and vines during the winter. If you anticipate problems, wrap hardware cloth or a commercial tree-wrap product around vulnerable stems. Remember, rabbits, deer, mice, and voles can reach pretty high when standing on a foot or two of snow.

Source: Month-By-Month Gardening in Ohio

REMINDERS:

Don't forget to turn in your MGV hours to Linda Dyer by the end of the year.

No January meeting or newsletter. Next monthly mtg: Thursday, February 11th.

THANK YOU!

Thanks to Dr. Ed Lentz for his informative presentation on Phosphorus at our MGV Meeting.

Thanks to Marilynn Beltz, Randy Greeno, and Pam McCloud for the tasty refreshments.

Air Plants (*Tillandsia*)

We love *Tillandsia* plants for their enormous variety of over 600 exotic, eye-catching species in an array of spectacular colors, sizes, textures and shapes. With peculiar forms and radiant, often fluctuating colors, these eccentric plants create an alluring display full of unique splendor.

Common name: Air plants, *Tillandsia*

Botanical name: *Tillandsia* species

Flowers: Tillandsias can blossom in an abundance of stunning, vibrant colors with some blooms ranging from only a few weeks to all year long.

Foliage: Foliage will vary depending on variety; some plants' leaves may be thick, hairy and succulent while others are soft, thin and coiling. Regardless of species, the bizarre foliage is sure to offer an abundance of colorful, dazzling charm.

Habit: With hundreds of differing varieties, air plants will vary in shape and size. As epiphytes, they absorb nutrients through the air using their leaves. They use their roots for mounting to virtually anything—they can cling to branches and stumps, hang from a string or a wire, and/or be placed in decorative containers—such as traditional pots, vases or cups.

Season: Year-round as a houseplant.

Origin: Native to warmer climates of North and South America.



How to grow *Tillandsia* as a houseplant:

Air plants are relatively easy to grow. They will thrive when placed in a warm, well-ventilated area near a south-, east- or west-facing window or in a location with lots of bright, indirect light. Tillandsias should be watered thoroughly—to the point of saturation—2 to 4 times a week. You can shake off any excess water and let them dry out before next watering. Many growers recommend fully submerging the plants (when not in bloom) in a bowl of water for around 30 minutes every few weeks—in dry areas, you can leave plants in water for 3 to 4 hours. These plants can easily become dehydrated, so watering is crucial. Leaves will begin to curl under if they're becoming dehydrated. You can fertilize once a month to encourage more vigorous growth, however it is not necessary. Remember: Specific care will vary depending on species.



Source: Horticulture Smart Gardening, horticulture-community.com]

Stevia in the Windowsill Garden



Looking for a fun gardening project for chasing away your winter blues? Why not try growing Stevia in your windowsill garden. It may not be the most ornamental of plants, but hopefully will present a sweet reward for your efforts.

Stevia rebaudiana, also known as sweetleaf and sugarleaf, is a low-growing, tender, perennial herb grown for the high levels of stevioside, which can be 30-300 times sweeter than cane sugar yet has zero calories. The plant originally hails from humid, subtropical regions of South America and is a member of the Aster family.

While Stevia will not overwinter in Indiana's outdoor gardens, it can be grown as an annual outdoors during the frost-free season or indoors in containers. The plants prefer full sun and well-drained soil, so give it as bright a location as you can. Supplemental lighting would be helpful indoors. Keep the plant away from hot and cold drafts.

Like many culinary herbs, flavor will be at its peak just before blooming, but Stevia may not bloom much when grown exclusively indoors. Foliage can be snipped as needed.

Stevia does vary in sweetness and quality of flavor when grown by seed and is known for having a low germination rate. Plants of known quality can be propagated by cuttings for best results, but they may be difficult to find in local garden centers.

Some garden suppliers offer improved cultivars, either by seed or rooted cuttings such as Honey Dip, Sweetie Sixteen or Crazy Sweet. Check your local garden center or retail herb farm for availability of plants. The Herb Society of American has an excellent article about Stevia.

Source: purdue.hort.edu

Master Gardener Volunteer Meeting Minutes Thursday November 12, 2015

For our Brown Bag Education, Dr. Ed Lentz presented "Management of Phosphorus." He discussed how dumping of raw sewage, septic tanks, and use of fertilizers have contributed to the harmful algal bloom problem in Lake Erie. High phosphorus amounts cause excessive algae growth. The algae produces toxins which can be harmful to humans, wildlife and marine life. Lake Erie is shared by 5 states, 1 province and 2 countries which makes it a very important resource. We need to protect this resource by limiting raw sewage dumping and fertilizer run-off. Ed stated that farmers are using less fertilizer now than in the 70's.

VP Noreen Walters called the meeting to order at 7:45 pm. President Marilynn Beltz was not in attendance.

Bill Jones stated that nominations are needed for V.P. and Secretary positions.

Be sure to turn your hours in to Linda Dyar or Bill Jones before Dec. 31.

Planning session for 2016

- Maybe change location of library presentations and consider changing topics.
- Continue brown bag education but maybe not during Feb. or March when MGTV training is going on.
- Field Trips.
- Speakers bureau – need chair.
- Fingerprinting- whenever OSU decides when and how.
- Need more articles for the Courier.
- Community Gardens – Karl and Lynn.
- Wreath Classes- need different greens from MGTV, cutting dates.

Ann Woolum motioned to adjourn. Barb Phillips second the motion.

Submitted by Pam McCloud in the absence of Lauri Inkrott. Thank you, Pam, for filling in!

Flower of the Month – African violet

By Bill Jones

African violet or Usambara violet is botanically known as *Saintpaulia ionantha*. It is a member of the Gesneriaceae family and is no relation to the common violet, which is from the Violaceae family. Other members of the Gesneriaceae family include Streptocarpus and Gloxinias.

African violets were sent to Europe in 1892 by Baron Adalbert Emil Walter Redcliffe le Tanneux von Saint Paul-Illaire, district governor of Usambara, in what was the German colony of Tanganyika (Tanzania). He collected seeds and plants and sent them to his father, Baron Ulrich von Saint Paul, an amateur horticulturalist, who took them to the Royal Botanic Garden at Herrenhausen (Hanover, Germany). The plant was named Saintpaulia after the two barons, father and son. Ionantha was given as the specific epithet due to Io being the lover of the Greek god, Zeus, who was changed into a heifer to protect her and she was given a field of violets to eat. The term ‘antha’ or ‘anthos’ refers to the word “flower.” So, Ionantha would refer to “violet-like flowers.”



When the British took over the Tanganyika colony after WW I, more African violets were discovered. The flowers were soon available in purples, pinks and near reds, whites, and bicolor with both single and double flowers. There are no yellows or oranges and the leaves vary.

In their native Tanzania, African violets grow in the shady, humid forests of the Usambara Mountains in the north. They grow naturally in rock crevices where small amounts of soil have been deposited and water drains away rapidly. Though they thrive on 80 percent humidity, they must not be over-watered. They get much of their water from the atmosphere through the fine hairs that cover the surface of their leaves. These hairs take in moisture from the air, like miniature roots, and trap raindrops, separating them so the leaves do not suffocate. The roots themselves remain relatively dry.

The giving of African violets is a symbol of sweetness and appreciation.

The Master Gardener *Green Thumb Print* is a publication of the Hancock County Extension Office, 7868 County Road 140, Findlay, OH, 45840, 419-422-3851. The Master Gardener Volunteer Program Coordinator is Bill Jones.

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Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration; Associate Dean, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences; Director, Ohio State University Extension; and Gist Chair in Extension Education and Leadership.

For deaf & hard of hearing, please contact Hancock County Extension using your preferred communication (email, relay services, or video relay services). Phone 1-800-750-0750 between 8 am & 5 pm EST Monday-Friday. Inform the operator to dial 419-422-3851.