

October 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:

- Common roadside weed—Smartweed
- Flower of the month—Cosmos
- Cover-up your garden
- Fall Gardening, Minutes, More

Dates to Remember!

Monday, October 5: “Heirloom garden plants” presentation by Pat Flinn, Hancock County Library, 6:30.

Thursday, October 8: Brown Bag Presentation by Ann Brickner on “wintersown seeds-starting seeds the easy way,” OSU Extension Office, 6:00.

Thursday, October 8: MGVS Monthly Meeting, OSU Extension Office, 7:00.

Monday, November 2: “Holiday Table Decorations” presentation by Cheryl Miller, Hancock County Library, 6:30. See page 6.

Upcoming Events

Nov. 30, Dec. 2, Dec. 6, Dec 7, Dec. 9:

Wreath Classes

Thursday, Dec. 17:

Christmas Potluck



Coordinator's Corner

by Bill Jones

From the floods of spring to the drought of fall, what a gardening year we have had. I had a question today from someone with English walnuts who wondered why the hulls weren't splitting off the nuts. The lack of rain during the final weeks of nut development is probably the reason for this strange behavior.

Patrick Flinn will be discussing heirloom garden plants at 6:30 PM at the Findlay-Hancock County Public Library on October 5. Let's try to support him at this presentation.

On October 8, Ann Brickner from the Perennial Plant Peddler, will provide our Brown Bag training with a Demonstration of Milk Jug Greenhouses. Ed Lentz will provide our Brown Bag training in November with a discussion on Phosphorous and how we can prevent unnecessary runoff into the public waterways.

Our October article will be provided by Lyn Maa and it will appear in the Saturday, October 24 issue of the Courier. Look for the article in the Weekend section.

I worked in the Ask a Master Gardener booth at the Farm Science Review on September 22. I had a

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Coordinator's Corner—Continued

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great time meeting many people and answering some good garden questions. We even had some excitement when a lady passed out at our booth and my wife, Karen, a retired ER nurse, tended to her while I called 911.

Ed Lentz has established the dates for our 2016 MGVS Training. It will take place on each Tuesday in February and March from 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM. An additional Saturday field trip is also being planned. If you have a good destination for the field trip, please let me know.

Remember to fertilize your lawns around Halloween with 1 pound of N per 1000 square feet of lawn. This will make your lawn healthier and ready to green up when the warm days of spring return.

Many thanks to Christa Gupta for her informative and delicious Brown Bag presentation at our September meeting. Christa provided some novel, tasty dishes using her vegetable garden produce. She even provided each of us with the recipe for each creation.

Thanks to all of you for the many ways you take ownership of the Master Gardener program and help to make it successful. I'm proud to be a Hancock County Master Gardener Volunteer.

—Bill

Gardening Tip

Broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage can easily tolerate a few light frosts and the chilling will actually improve their quality. Brussels sprouts, in particular, become sweeter after a frost, as do kale and collards. So, don't be in a hurry to harvest these cool-weather crops. Before a hard freeze, however, make sure to either provide protection for the plants by covering them with plastic or a floating row cover, or lift the plants with their root balls and set them in moist soil in a deep cold frame.

THANKS to Christa Gupta for her September brown bag presentation on “How does your garden taste.” Her presentation was very informative and her garden treats were delicious!

THANKS to Barb Sherman, Barbara Phillips, & Sharon Hammer Baker for providing refreshments at our October MGVS meeting.

It's Fall planting time when ...

- Soil temperatures in your area are approaching 55°F (Bulbs need cool soil to make roots before winter.)
- Fall nighttime temperatures stay between 40° and 50°F (You have about 8 weeks to plant after the first frost as long as the ground is not frozen.)
- You blow out the irrigation system before the winter freeze
- The fall striped bass run is on
- The fall foliage has moved just past peak
- Squirrels are digging in acorns as fast they can
- Birds start grouping
- You start to smell wood smoke
- The soft woods in the high peaks start to yellow
- You start closing windows
- The grapes are ripening on the vine
- You don't hear the crickets any more
- You start turning the heat on in your car
- While driving, you see leaves bouncing along the interstate
- The hostas start to lie down
- You catch a whiff of that organic, decaying leaf smell
- The dog stops lying in that round hole he dug in the garden, and moves to a sunny spot
- Your kids start putting on their jackets without any nagging from you

Bulbs that flower in spring must be planted in fall. There is no getting around this requirement. So when you see the above signs, it's time to purchase and plant those bulbs!

Farm Science Review

Below is Bill Jones working at the “Ask A Master Gardener” booth at the Farm Science Review on Tuesday, September 22, near London, Ohio. Although the temperature was very hot and humid, he was able to assist many people with their tree, lawn, and garden problems.



How to Tell When a Pumpkin is Ripe—

Color is a Good Indicator. Chances are that if your pumpkin is orange all the way around, your pumpkin is ripe. But on the other hand, a pumpkin does not need to be all the way orange to be ripe. Some pumpkins are ripe when they are still completely green. When you are ready to harvest a pumpkin, use other ways to double check whether it is ripe or not.

Give Them a Thump. Another way how to tell when pumpkins are ripe is to give the pumpkin a good thump or a slap. If the pumpkin sounds hollow, that the pumpkin is ripe and ready to be picked.



The Skin is Hard. The skin of a pumpkin will be hard when the pumpkin is ripe. Use a fingernail and gently try to puncture the pumpkin’s skin. If the skin dents but does not puncture, the pumpkin is ready to pick.

The Stem is Hard. When the stem above the pumpkin in question starts to turn hard, the pumpkin is ready for picking.

Harvest the Pumpkin. Now that you know how to tell when pumpkins are ripe, you should know how best to harvest a pumpkin. Use a sharp knife, leave a long stem to slow down rotting, and disinfect by wiping down with 10% bleach solution to kill any organisms on the skin that cause rotting. Keep out of direct sunlight.

Can a common roadside weed be more than just a nuisance?

Persicaria pensylvanicum is known as **smartweed**.

“It is a common sight in waste areas and in nutrient-poor fields. The unique, pale pink flowers bloom most of the summer and into autumn. Gardeners and farmers despise the plant because it produces tons of seeds and is capable of regenerating from every joint along the stem.



Smartweed flourishes in areas that have recently flooded or stay damp and the seeds can lay dormant for years before conditions are right to germinate. You can chop and pull them from your vegetable garden but if even the smallest piece is left on the ground that has a node on it...whammy! A whole new plant quickly takes root. The plants should be removed from your garden and if they are used in a compost pile, make sure that it is hot enough to break them down completely. Flower heads and seeds shouldn't be composted as they are tough enough to withstand all but the hottest piles.

This sounds like a horrible nuisance and it gets even better (or worse, depending on your perspective.) The broken stems produce a sap that irritates the skin of some people. Smartweed seems to be a kill-proof plant that causes trouble on a number of levels. What could possibly benefit from its existence? The answer is “yes.”

Persicaria pensylvanicum is a member of the buckwheat family and that is one of the reasons it produces so many seeds. These seeds are an important food source for wildlife, especially birds. Many small mammals, waterfowl and shorebirds flock to areas with smartweed colonies. The plants are excellent erosion control and they help purify stagnant water as well.

The interesting pink flowers are a magnet for honeybees, pollinators and butterflies. They are nectar and pollen-rich which sustains so many of our winged friends including monarchs and other butterflies, honeybees, bumblebees, and other pollen-gathering beetles. If you have a secluded, damp, sunny spot, let a little smartweed flourish. You'll be surprised at the increase in insects.

Smartweed was used by the Native Americans in a number of ways. The seeds were gathered and mixed with other items to enhance flavor as they have a sharp, peppery taste. The young leaves were eaten as a potherb and were used as seasoning as well. An infusion of the leaves treated fevers and the crushed leaves were applied to hemorrhoids as a early form of Preparation H. (please don't try this at home!)



Depending on the mordant and process, *Persicaria pensylvanicum* can be used as a natural dye to produce yellow, green or blue tints. This is understandable when you realize that a relative of this plant is the one that produces the iconic indigo color that Japan is so famous for.

With just a little research, we can find positive traits in just about any plant that has been tagged a 'weed'. The beneficial properties may be long-forgotten, or other substances proved better at the task, but they were still vital to survival at some point in our history. Wildlife still depend on many of these plants as well. Before you destroy an unwanted plant, please take a minute to think about what it may be sustaining. If it isn't in a high traffic area and doesn't pose a threat to family or pets, let it stay. The birds and butterflies will thank you.”

Source: from Sept. 5, 2015 article by Melody Rose on davesgarden.com website

October Flower of the Month - Cosmos

By Bill Jones



Cosmos is a genus, with the same common name of Cosmos. It includes between 20–26 species of flowering plants in the family Asteraceae.

It is native to the scrub and meadowland of Mexico where most of the species occur. It is also native to Florida, Arizona, Central America, and South America.

Cosmos are herbaceous perennial plants growing 10 in. to over 6 ft. tall. The leaves are simple, pinnate, or bi-pinnate, and are arranged in opposite pairs.

The plant does not require much care. It is a perfect choice for new gardeners. In

fact, it is one of the easiest annual plants to grow that blooms profusely.

Cosmos blooms attract pollinators, making them an ideal choice for butterfly garden, bird garden, wild flower garden, and as companion plants for vegetables in an organic garden. Cosmos flowers have long stems so they make wonderful cut flowers.

Cosmos plants are propagated by seed. They have big seeds so they are easy to plant. Most cosmos are annuals. The perennial varieties may be propagated by division of their rhizomes.

Cosmos can do well even on average and poor soils and dry soil conditions. Their only major requirements are full sun and good drainage.

Powdery mildew is the major enemy of Cosmos. It is caused by crowded conditions or a very damp environment. Aphids can also be a threat to Cosmos if the plants nearby are affected by an infestation.



We have included Orange Cosmos in the Triangle Garden for several years as a background plant to the annuals, which are located near the curbs. It has been a consistently good performer in periods of wet as well as in drought. The picture above shows Marilyn Beltz diligently deadheading the Cosmos to prolong the blooms.

MGV Volunteers at work!



**MARATHON
CENTER**
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

On September 26, 5 MGVs volunteered their expertise in planting hundreds of daylilies, shrubs, and grasses at the new MPAC in Findlay. We joined with about 35 other community volunteers in the exhausting task of digging with picks and shovels each of the holes for the various plants. Often times, there were bricks and stones and even large pieces of foundation blocks in the area where the plant was designed to go. Fortunately, we had some young college students who could help with some of the heavy-duty pick and shovel work. Ann Woolum even ran in the Komen Race for the Cure before joining in the digging and planting. Many thanks to **Ann Woolum, Marilynn Beltz, Linda Laux, Randy Greeno, and Bill Jones** for representing the Hancock County Master Gardener Volunteers in this service project.



Library Presentations: Come and support our fellow MGVs.

October 5:

Pat Flinn will be presenting "heirloom garden plants."

November 2:

Cheryl Miller will be presenting "holiday table decorations." Cheryl will be creating arrangements for the holiday table which will include ideas for smaller accent pieces appropriate for a side table or mantel and larger arrangements for the holiday dinner/buffet table. In her presentation, she will be demonstrating how to utilize many natural items found in the backyard garden or the local farmers market.

Mushrooms Growing in Houseplant Soil

Most of the time when people are growing houseplants, they are doing so to bring some of the outdoors indoors. But normally people want green plants, not little mushrooms. Mushrooms growing in houseplant soil is a common problem.



What Causes Mushrooms Growing in Houseplant Soil?

Mushrooms growing in houseplants are caused by a fungus. The mushrooms are the fruit of that fungus. One of the most common mushrooms found growing in houseplants is the *Leucocoprinus birnbaumii*. This is a light yellow mushroom with either a balled or flat cap depending on how mature they are.

The spores that are the cause of mushrooms growing in houseplant soil is normally introduced by contaminated soilless mix. But occasionally, they can be introduced through other means such as airborne movement or spores brushing off clothing.

Most frequently, mushrooms will appear in houseplants in the summer when conditions are right for them. Unlike lawn mushrooms (which prefer cool, moist conditions), mushrooms in houseplants prefer that air be warm, moist and humid.

Getting Rid of Mushrooms in Houseplants

Unfortunately, this is no easy task. Once soil becomes infected, it is very difficult to remove the spores and fungus that causes the mushrooms, but there are a few things you can try:

- **Remove the caps** – By removing the caps as soon as possible, you are removing the source of the spores which result in mushrooms growing in houseplant soil. This will also help keep mushrooms out of your other houseplants.
- **Scrape the soil** – Scraping the top two inches of soil off the houseplants pot and replacing it may help, but the fungus may regrow and the mushrooms will return.
- **Change the soil** – Changing the soil may possibly help with getting rid of mushrooms. One of the problems is that it is not healthy to remove all of the soil from a plant's roots (through washing or rinsing) and the fungus may still be present and regrow from the soil left on the roots of the houseplant.
- **Drench the soil with fungicide** – Drenching the houseplant's soil with fungicide may help with eliminating mushrooms in houseplants, but again, if not all of the fungus is killed, the mushrooms will return. You may need to try this treatment several times before the fungus is killed completely.
- **Change the conditions** – If the air is less humid, the soil less moist or the temperature less warm, this will reduce the number of mushrooms that appear. Unfortunately, the conditions that are ideal for mushrooms are also ideal for most houseplants, so by changing the conditions you may harm the houseplant itself.

Getting rid of mushrooms in houseplants is hard, but mushrooms growing in houseplant soil will not harm your plant nor will they harm you unless you eat them. You may want to consider just letting them grow. If you want to get whimsical, you could add a few animal or fairy figurines near them and create a little forest garden right inside your house.

Source: [gardeningknowhow](http://gardeningknowhow.com)

Hancock County MGV Meeting

September 10, 2015

Christa Gupta provided our Brown Bag Training. She presented “How does your garden taste.” And her garden tasted delicious! She treated us to squash soup, pickles, chocolate, zucchini bread, and marinated basil tomatoes among other delectable treats. She discussed food preservation and how it was done before refrigeration and canners. Thank you Christa for spoiling us!

The meeting was brought to order at 7:02pm with 20 in attendance.

There was a correction to the secretary’s report, due to a conflict the Christmas potluck will be on **December 17th** not December 10th as was stated in the last meeting minutes.

Bill Lanning reported that the Historical Society sent a thank you note for their work at Back Street Days (and cleaning up the gardens at the Historical Society).

Bill Jones commented that the state has an overstock of MGV shirts if anyone would still like one but quantities are limited.

There are still no dates set for the MGV training classes but most likely will be in Feb. and March on Wednesdays.

The planting for the performing arts center will be on September 26, with 2 shifts. The first shift will begin at 8:30 am.

Lauri stated that the next brown bag training will be given by Ann Brickner on Wintersown seeds-starting seeds the easy way. It was suggested that someone north of Van Buren who was on the garden tour is willing to let us come to tour his gardens but no one could remember his name.

Patrick Flinn’s library presentation will be on heirloom vegetable gardening on Oct. 5.

Karl told us that 312 people have been to our Facebook page, 23 are actively engaged with it and 90 people are following us. He also stated that they are still picking at the community garden and there is plenty of produce if anyone wants any.

Anita Lanning will be contacting Ruth Furiate for the mugs and décor for Mugs of Joy. She stated that Ruth has started packing for her move.

In tips and interesting things learned it was brought to our attention that Pat was nearly arrested after being seen in the community garden with his “Hoe”. “Petunia” could not be reached for comment.

Lauri asked if anyone had suggestions to help recover her mother’s pachysandra. The leaves begin with spots then the plants are covered with scale. Bill Jones and Pat suggested Bayer Tree and Shrub drench after removing diseased plant material.

On a somber note Linda Jones mentioned a visit with JoAnn Reed who is not doing well and can only communicate by writing on a tablet.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55pm.

Respectfully submitted by Lauri Inkrott.

Dress up your Autumn Garden

The days are getting shorter, the temperatures are a bit cooler and there is a definite nip in the air when the sun sets. That all means one thing: autumn is approaching and its time to give our gardens a fresh look for the season.

It is time to remove spent annuals from the garden. Heat, drought and the end of the summer season has many annuals and tender perennials looking a bit tattered and worn. But there is no need to leave vacant spots in the garden. Below are a few suggestions:

- Swap out spent annuals with pansies, cabbages and kales.
- In cold-winter areas, protect your pansies or violas with pine boughs when the temperatures drop and they begin to fade; they may survive the winter to return in the spring for an early flush of blooms.
- Plant spring-flowering bulbs such as tulips in the vacant spots left by discarded annuals.
- If you have room in the back of the border, now is a great time to plant perennial grasses. The browns, golds and rust colors of many perennial grasses are perfect for autumn and come spring, you will be ahead of the game for planting.
- Pot up tender perennials or annuals you want to save. On warm days, tuck the planted pots into the garden to fill empty spots and on cooler nights, stash them in the garage for protection. Once winter comes, bring the pots indoors for overwintering.
- Pumpkins, gourds and decorative corn are wonderful, traditional autumn additions to the garden. Fair warning: They may attract hungry squirrels and deer, so add them knowing they may be a feast for your garden critters one day.
- Plan ahead: Before it gets too cold, scout out trees and shrubs from which you can take cuttings for winter container gardens and home décor ideas.



Taking Stock of Your Garden

Now is the perfect time to take a critical eye to the garden and identify areas that will benefit from new trees and the division of perennials. Here are few key points to keep in mind as you evaluate your garden and begin planting.

Perennials:

If you think your perennials need dividing, chances are they do. Most perennials respond well from dividing every three years. For example, are you noticing bald spots in the center of your Siberian iris or ornamental grasses? If yes, then it is time to divide. With a few exceptions (such as blue false indigo, peonies, Cimicifuga, butterfly weed, Astilbe, columbine and Russian sage) most perennials respond well from regular divisions.

Tips for Dividing Perennials:

- The number of eyes in a mature plant will dictate how many cuts or divisions you can make. The fewer number of eyes, the slower a newly divided plant will thrive in its new spot. A rule of thumb is three eyes per new division. However, you may tend to break the rule with hostas and daylilies—they seem to thrive on even the tiniest of divisions.
- Use clean tools to minimize transmission of plant diseases.
- Divide plants on cool, overcast days to reduce the amount of stress on the plant.
- Prepare new planting areas before you divide. The less time the plant is out of the soil, the better.
- Water plants immediately after transplanting.

Do you need to add new trees?

- Will the new trees create or add to a shaded area? Is this desirable?
- How large will the mature tree become?
- Do you have room in the garden?
- Will the tree's height interfere with power lines, the home or other nearby trees?
- New trees require a bit of care, especially if the following spring and summer are hot and dry.
- Can you easily water the newly planted tree? The better able you are to care for the tree in its early years, the more likely it will thrive into adulthood

Source: hortmag.com

Cover your garden

On average, the typical garden is bare soil at least half the year, which creates a place of starvation for the good soil organisms needed for healthy plants. Cover crops provide a solution to this problem. What happens below the ground determines the health of plants above the ground. We know this and apply fertilizers and compost to their soil during the planting and growing season, but what about throughout late fall, winter, and early spring?

Cover crops (also known as “green manure”) are defined by the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as “crops including grasses, legumes, forbs, or other herbaceous plants established for seasonal cover and conservation purposes.” In most cases, farmers are the ones planting cover crops, but home gardeners have begun to take notice of these plants’ benefits as well.

Why plant cover crops?

- They unlock nutrients. Unlike our tomato or pepper plants that are taking nutrients from the soil, cover crops keep and put nutrients back into the soil. Cover crops are able to hold on to nutrients during the off-season since they work as a slow release fertilizer the following year when the plants and soil need these nutrients.
- Cover crops increase the amount of organic matter in the soil, which in turn makes for a favorable environment for beneficial fungi and microorganisms. For example, the common fungi mycorrhizae can increase the rooting area of your plants by up to 200 percent. You have a vegetable garden from May through October and during that time, the mycorrhizae are building up in your soil and benefitting your plants – but what happens at the end of the season? You take out your garden, the soil is bare, the mycorrhizae have nothing to feed on, and you’re starting from scratch again next spring.
- This same principle applies for other beneficial microorganisms. Cover crops provide the food and habitat these fungi need to survive and thrive all year long. Cover crops restore a balance to the soil through living roots, which provides food

and habitat for the good microorganisms.

- Cover crops also decrease disease and weed pressure. A recent three-year study by the University of Illinois showed a 90 percent reduction of rhizoctonia root rot and the lowest levels of septoria brown spot after cereal rye was grown. As for weeds, the most effective and least invasive method of weed control is shade, and a good thick stand of cover crops provides a lot of shade.
- The list of benefits of cover crops goes on and on. Better drainage. Reduced soil erosion. Minimized soil compaction. Increased biodiversity.



How do you get started using cover crops?

Begin by determining the cycles of your garden. Do you plant mostly summer vegetables? Or do you grow spring and fall plants too? Do you have enough space to keep a fallow plot and rotate your garden? A example of what one gardener does is switch his garden back and forth between plots every other year. In the fallow plot, he grows different varieties of cover crops all year long, while in his garden plot, he uses cover crops for short periods of time between plantings.

The general goal is to get four weeks of growth on a cover crop before either you or cold/warm weather kills it. Whenever you have an open space in your

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Cover-ups for your garden—Continued

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garden, then do it.

There are four ways to begin using cover crops:

- Plant oats, peas or radishes in early spring (March 15-April 15) if you have bare ground and you're not going to use that space until summer or fall.
- Plant buckwheat anywhere you have a 30-40 day blank space between May 1-September 1.
- Plant oats and radishes after spring or summer vegetables are done (July 15-Sept 15).
- Plant cereal rye in the fall (Sept 15- Nov 30).

To plant a cover crop, rake the garden area smooth and remove debris or large stones. Broadcast the seed according to the rates on the chart below. Lightly rake again, and water in the cover crop with your hose set at a fine mist.

Suggestions for type of cover crops.

- Buckwheat is the go-to cover crop for summer seeding between spring and fall crops. It attracts multiple beneficial insects with its white blossoms.
- Cereal rye outperforms all other cover crops in infertile and sandy soil. It's the best cover crop for absorbing unused soil nitrogen, which will protect local water quality.
- Crimson clover grows rapidly and sends out deep roots. It does a good job providing nitrogen for the next crop.
- Oats are low-cost, reliable, quick-growing, and good in any mix.
- Radish (forage/oilseed type, not a salad radish) captures a lot of nitrogen and breaks soil compaction.

When using cover crops, you not only need to consider when to plant them, but also when and how to kill them. Some gardeners use Round-up while others till the cover crops under the soil. If you plant your cover crops in the fall, you may not need to spray or till. Cover crops such as oats and radishes simply die during the cold of winter.

No matter how big or small your garden plot, you can use cover crops and reap the same benefits.

Source:

"Cover Up: Cover crops improve soil fertility", by Julie Oudman Perkins - September 2015
Statebystategardening.com



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.

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