

Dunesland Latest Dirt



PRESIDENTS' POINTS

In this month's newsletter we are discussing early spring pruning, but as I'm writing this, my trees and shrubs are covered in snow—lots of snow. So, I'm going to focus on our fine feathered friends outside. My husband and I feed "our" birds (I'm kind of possessive) all year through all seasons, but we are a little more attentive in the winter. In Beth's Corner you will find two recipes for simple make-at-home suet cakes and a quick and easy birdhouse.

To me—March is Irish, so I've included a recipe for Irish Apple Cake. We find all kinds of recipes for Irish stew and corned beef and cabbage for St. Patrick's Day, but not many Irish desserts. Since it's still cold, I'm adding an easy, peasy recipe for tomato soup.

Next month we'll be talking a little bit about seed starting, but I want to mention a few seeds that need to be started before that time. Using a May 20th frost date, onion seeds should be started from February 11 to March 4 for the plants to be ready to be planted outdoors by May 20th. Leeks, parsley and pansies should be planted from February 25 to March 11, and celery seeds from March 4th.

Enjoy the recipes and have fun with the projects.

Beth



Although we are still in the winter season, we can see that the end is in sight. This is the month of St. Patrick's Day and the wearing of the green. Even if you're not Irish, green is the sign of spring and we're certainly looking forward to that. Even the calendar says spring starts this month. Remember also that we go back to daylight savings this month, too; another sign of spring.

We still have time before the busyness of spring overtakes us, so let's focus on caring this month. There are many things that need care right now. If you haven't cleaned and sharpened your tools, now is the time to care for them. Winter care for our trees and shrubs includes checking and pruning this month. Winter is taking a toll on our birds as well; there are some ways we can care for them. There is information in this issue or on our website about these topics.

Just a little update on our club—I'd like you to know that we have had two new people join even though we are unable to have our meetings in person. I know we're all anxious to welcome them personally to the club, but for now we will do it virtually. We're thrilled that we are able to have an active and appealing club even in this pandemic era.

We are also considering alternatives to our annual auction of our extra plants. Look for more information on this in next month's issue.

Let's care for ourselves, each other, our animals and plants for whom we truly are custodians.

Sandi

ISSUE 7 March 2021



Presidents' Points — Beth & Sandi.....1

Seed Starting Indoors.....2

Dormant Oils.....3

Winter Pruning3

Spring.....3

Web Resources3

Midwest Monthly Gardening.....4

Native Plant Nerd.....5

Winter Birds5

Beth's Corner6,7

Recipes6

Craft Ideas.....7

Reblooming8

Birthdays.....8

Sunshine8

Coming Next Month.....8

You can find this month's newsletter and all articles posted on our website every month if you want to catch up, re-read something or share an article with a friend!

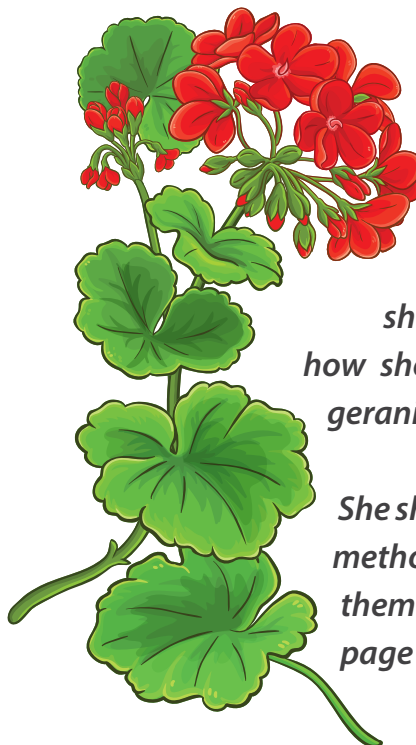


SEED STARTING INDOORS

Now is the time to plan ahead for your seed starting. Here are basic items you will need before you begin. Choose your area to work and hold your pots; then assemble your equipment:

1. **Seeds** – Seed catalogues give you a large selection. Local garden centers also have seed.
2. **Labels and Marker** – To keep your seeds organized so you know what's growing.
3. **Seed Starting Soil** – Sterile seed starting mix is loose and finer grained.
4. **Pots, Trays & Moisture Domes** – Seed pots, trays and dome need to be sterile, so if using last year's equipment, clean with the bleach and water. Plastic wrap can be used in place of dome, but takes more care.
5. **Water Spray Bottle** to water the new plants.
6. **Lights, Heating Mat**– Plant lights which can be raised as the plants grow. Heating mat will help the seeds germinate. Helpful, but not necessary IF you have light and heat enough for seed starting.
7. **Water Soluble Fertilizer** – Use at ¼ strength once a week.
8. **Larger Pots, Container Soil and Fertilizer** – Larger pots are needed once the seedlings outgrow the small seed pots. Use Potting Soil with fertilizer in the larger pots.

YOU CAN FIND LINK TO A VIDEO ON
SEED STARTING ON OUR WEBSITE



This month, club member Gayle shared with April how she over-winters her geraniums in paper bags.

She shared photos of her method and you can find them on the Geranium page on our website!



DORMANT OILS

To protect our precious plants and our environment we look for safe and natural ways to garden. Oil-based pesticides are an effective and ecologically friendly way to handle many insect pests and even some diseases. Various oils have been used for centuries. They remain an important tool to manage certain pest problems (e.g. scales, aphids, mites) on fruit trees, shade trees and woody ornamental plants. Several recently developed oils extend this usefulness to flowers, vegetables and other herbaceous plants. Oils also can control some plant diseases such as powdery mildew.



Usually called dormant oil or horticultural oil, they pose few risks to people or to most desirable species, including beneficial natural enemies of insect pests. This allows oils to integrate well with biological controls. Toxicity is minimal, at least compared to alternative pesticides, and oils quickly dissipate through evaporation, leaving little residue. Oils also are easy to apply with existing spray equipment and can be mixed with many other pesticides to extend their performance.

Dormant Season Applications to control some of these pests:

- Aphids that curl leaves in spring
- Caterpillars that winter as eggs on the plant (leafrollers, tent caterpillars)
- Mites that winter on the plant (e.g. conifer-infesting species)
- Scale Insects (e.g. pine needle scale, striped pine scale, Kermes scale, cottony maple scale)

Diseases

- Powdery mildew
- Some aphid-transmitted viruses

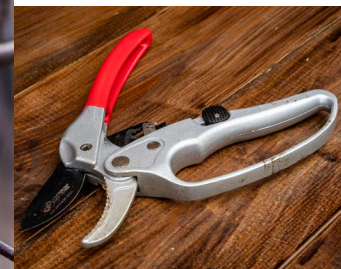
Visit the Garden Club website to learn more about how to maximize the use of dormant oils and find out about plants that are sensitive to oil.



WINTER PRUNING

Trees and shrubs are not growing and dormant so it's the best time to prune. You are doing easy, manageable pruning. Leave the extensive, large scale pruning to later in the season or to an expert (arborist). Good pruning keeps your trees and shrubs attractive, healthy and less susceptible to injury or disease.

- 1. What to Prune In The Winter:** Summer and fall bloomers are what you're pruning in winter. *If they bloom in the spring (for example: lilacs, forsythia, magnolia, azalea, rhododendron, etc.) they should NOT be pruned in the winter.* If you prune spring bloomers in winter, you will cut off the formed blooming buds. Spring bloomers should be pruned right after blooming.
- 2. Purpose:** Look at the overall natural form, dead or broken branches, smaller noticeable problems, mowing problems (low branches) or extensive/large-scale pruning. Remember, you are doing easy, manageable pruning.
- 3. Tools:** Eye protection, gloves, sharpened hand pruners, lopping shears or hand pruning saw. Tools should be sharpened because a crunched cut can cause more damage or disease problems later than a sharp cut. Also clean your tools (*spray bottle solution of 2 Tbsp. rubbing alcohol and 1C water*) so you don't carry diseases from one plant to another.



- 4. Take Your Time:** The rule of thumb in pruning is to only prune off 1/3rd of the overall plants. More than that may put undue stress on a tree/shrub; it may not recover. Stop occasionally and step back to look at what you've done and where you will be pruning next.

YOU CAN FIND LINK TO VIDEOS AND
IN-DEPTH INSTRUCTIONS ON OUR WEBSITE



March 20th. That seems hard to believe doesn't it? But here it comes and it's time to get ready! Although it's too soon to start most seeds, there are a few exceptions. One of my early starts is caladiums. They take so long to get going because they like warm soil, so that's what I give them.

Deciding when to plant is based on the last frost date. You can find our frost date here: <https://www.isws.illinois.edu/statecli/Frost/frost.htm>

To summarize, the Illinois State Climatologist Office shows that 50% of the time our last frost is between April 21 and April 30. If you want to be a little more conservative, 90% of the time our last frost occurs between May 11 and 20. That is considered our average last frost date. There is practically never a frost after May 31st. So, choose how much you want to gamble! With that in mind, here is a seed starting calculator for you. Just put in the last frost date you think we'll have, and you can find out when to start your seeds. <https://awaytogarden.com/when-to-start-seeds-calculator/>

Next month we'll discuss seed starting, soil temperatures and other things to consider for planting in greater detail. We'll also highlight some new plants you might want try.

Spring is coming! Put your planning hat on and be ready to enjoy another gardening season.

YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND MORE RESOURCES ON OUR WEBSITE



•Workshops •Videos •Gardening Articles •Past Newsletters •Local Gardening Resources

And don't forget... send in your questions or comments and we can include them in future issues.

Share your photos, tips and stories — sharing those personal anecdotes and jokes help keep us all close!



MIDWEST MONTHLY GARDENING

March seems to be the anticipation month. March gives us Daylight Savings Time, St. Patrick's Day and the best of days – MARCH 20th, THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING! We're about to be very busy! Where to begin?

1. **Monitor and Planning**— Check plants for damage and list what needs to be done including what seeds you might want to start indoors. (You can see tips from on seed starting [here](#)...)
2. **Indoor Plants**—Choose plants for returning to your garden. Pot up caladium and tuberous begonias for summer color.



Winter Pruning— Complete your winter pruning before trees, evergreens and shrubs start showing new buds. (See [this month's article](#))

3. **Garden Bed Preparation**— Wait until soil feels like crumbly cake in your hands before you prepare any beds.
4. **Perennials and Bulbs**— Don't uncover garden beds until you are sure the frost has passed. Replant any perennials that have heaved out of the ground.



5. **Lawns**— Grass seeds grow best in cool weather. Some suggest sowing them on the last vestiges of snow allowing them to settle into the ground as it melts.
6. **Fruit Trees**— Apply a dormant oil spray to your fruit trees before the buds break to help control insects and disease. (More information on dormant oil [here](#))



7. **Trees and Shrubs**—Fertilize trees and shrubs just before they begin spring growth.
8. **Birds and Wildlife**—Continue to provide food and water for birds and wildlife. (We have a mission all about this on page 5 for you!)

Please follow [this link](#) to the website for more a more in-depth list of gardening tips for March.

— April



April is a horticulturist retired from the Chicago Botanic Garden. She shares monthly gardening tips and would love to help you out with plant and gardening questions.



April Meyers

Just [send her an email](#) and she will get back to you.



NATIVE PLANT NERD

Hi, I'm Katie, your home-grown native plant nerd! I'll be popping in every once in awhile to share information with you about some of the lovely plants that are native to our area of the Midwest, their benefits, and why you might want to add a few (or a lot!) of native plants to your landscape.

If you have any questions - reach out at native@duneslandgardenclub.com



Kate



Why Choose Native Plants?

There are so many beautiful plants available in the nursery trade, why would a person choose native plants? There are many reasons to plant natives, but today we'll focus on our lovely backyard friends, the birds and butterflies.

As we develop land for necessary urban, suburban, and agricultural use, we lose habitat for native creatures and the plants upon which they depend. Most North American song birds require insects to feed their young, and those insects need to eat the native plants with which they evolved.

Chickadees, for example, need between 5,000 and 9,000 insects to raise just one brood of babies! Caterpillars in particular are good food for baby chickadees. (We talk about caring for backyard birds in our Winter Birds article) Caterpillars are very often specialist feeders and need very specific plants to eat – native plants! With native plants, your backyard or patio can be a wonderful garden oasis for humans while providing some of that disappearing habitat that North American wildlife requires. If you enjoy watching the birds and butterflies in your backyard, consider planting the native plants they need!

You can find a chart on the website that lists butterflies and their native host plants if you want to create a colorful, native garden this summer!



WINTER BIRDS

Winter is also hard on our feathered friends. This month they are struggling to find resources to stay alive after February's bitter cold and snow.

Birds do have a variety of coping methods for survival. Some grow additional feathers for warmth. Others fluff up their feathers to create air pockets for insulation. Some are like bears. While they don't actually hibernate, they do slow their metabolism to conserve energy. Social birds like chickadee roost together at night in sheltered spots such as tree hollows. The combined heat generated by the group helps them stay warm. Yet survival is still perilous.

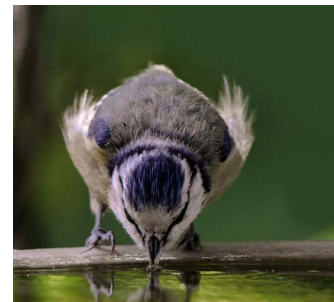
We can make it our mission to help these beautiful creatures thrive until spring.

Your mission: Make sure your bird houses are clean so birds can shelter there. If you have cavities in trees, don't fill them in.

Like all living things, birds need water to survive. Yes, they can eat snow, but that takes energy better used for other things. Water also helps birds keep their feathers clean which increases the insulation value.



Your mission: Keep water available. Heated water baths (to keep the water ice free) are wonderful. Be sure to keep them full and clean. Also provide a safe zone around the water free of hiding places for predators.



Birds burn a lot of calories to stay warm. Food is scarce. Some birds store caches of nuts and seeds for winter consumption. Sometimes they find dormant insects in tree bark. But by mid-winter, our birds are hungry.

Your mission: Provide a variety of food sources with feeders containing suet, thistle, sunflower seeds, berries and fruits to suit many different kinds of birds. Leave dead and dying trees in place to shelter bugs and provide cavities for your bird friends.

Care for your flock now and you will reap the reward of birdsong and color in the spring.





EASY PEASY TOMATO SOUP

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2 TBS butter | 2 TBS olive oil |
| 2 Cups onion, chopped | 3 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed |
| 2 Tsp kosher salt | 2 TBS flour |
| 28 oz can tomatoes (including juice) | 2 Cups chicken or vegetable broth |
| 2 basil sprigs (1 tsp dried basil) | |



1. Heat 2 tablespoons butter and 2 tablespoons olive oil in a saucepan.
2. Add two cups chopped onion, 3 smashed and peeled garlic cloves, and 2 teaspoons kosher salt.
3. Cook stirring often until soft and golden 6-8 minutes.
4. Stir in 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour; cook 1 minute.
5. Add a 28-ounce can of any kind of tomatoes—whole, diced or crushed—including juice, 2 cups of chicken or vegetable broth and 2 basil sprigs or 1 teaspoon dried basil.
6. Bring to boil, cover, reduce heat to low and simmer until tomatoes break down, about 20 minutes.
7. Cool slightly.
8. Puree in a blender until smooth, season with salt and pepper.
9. Re-warm to serve.

TIP: When blending, place a dish towel on top of the blender pitcher and hold it in place to keep the top from coming off the pitcher.

IRISH APPLE CAKE

The tomato soup is from Martha Stewart Living, September 2018

The Irish Apple Cake is from Food Network Magazine, March 2021

For Streusel Topping:

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|---|-------------------------------------|
| 6 tablespoons cool salted butter, plus more for pan | $\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour |
| $\frac{1}{4}$ cup rolled oats | $\frac{1}{2}$ cup granulated sugar |
| | pinch of salt |

For The Cake:

- | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| 1 stick salted butter at room temp | $\frac{1}{2}$ cup granulated sugar | 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract |
| 2 large eggs | 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups all-purpose flour | 1 teaspoon baking powder |
| 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon | $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt | 3 tablespoons milk |
| 3 Granny Smith apples, peeled and thinly sliced | | Confectioners' sugar for serving |

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Butter a 9-inch round cake pan and line the bottom with parchment paper.

For topping:

- In a bowl, combine the flour, oats, sugar and salt.
- Rub cold butter into dry mix until the texture of coarse breadcrumbs.
- Set aside in refrigerator.

For cake:

- Cream butter and sugar in a large bowl with a mixer until light and fluffy.
- Add vanilla, then beat in eggs one at a time.
- In a bowl, combine flour, baking powder, cinnamon and salt.
- Fold dry ingredients into wet ingredients with rubber spatula along with milk.
- Transfer batter to prepared pan.
- Lay on apple slices arranging in one even layer.
- Cover apples with all the streusel topping.
- Bake at 350 degrees until the top is golden brown and crisp, 60-70 minutes.
- Remove from oven and let cool slightly before turning out of pan onto a rack.

When ready to serve, dust cake with confectioners' sugar.



HOMEMADE SUET CAKE

Homemade suet cakes that fit standard suet feeders can be made with molds—

sandwich-size plastic freezer containers (Dollar Store). Save the store-bought plastic suet cake holders and reuse them as your molds. Be sure to coat each mold with a non-stick spray before putting in the suet mix. Recipe #1 uses empty orange juice cartons and slices the brick into feeder-sized cakes.

Suet cakes are great for woodpeckers, wrens, nuthatches and jays, but other birds occasionally use suet feeders too. Homemade suet cakes are great for winter months but should not be used in the hot summer.

To hang a suet cake without the feeder, place the end of a piece of rope or heavy string into the bottom of the mold/container leaving some of the rope/string out of the container. Pour in the suet mix and freeze. Hang with the string/rope.

You can find the photos that go with each of these crafts and recipes on our website. 

Recipe #1

- ½ cup fat or lard
- 2 cups old-fashioned oatmeal
- 2 cups chunky peanut butter
- 2 cups beef broth
- ½ cup raisins, dried cranberries or chopped nuts
- 1 ½ cups wild bird seed

1. Combine lard, oatmeal, peanut butter, broth and sugar in a large pot
2. Heat to a boil, reduce heat to simmer, simmer for 20 minutes until mixture is the texture of thick oatmeal
3. Stir in raisins and/or nuts
4. Remove from heat and stir in bird seed
5. Pour into mold/orange juice carton, put in freezer until hardened
6. Once hardened, remove suet from freezer. If using an orange juice carton, allow brick to soften slightly to ease in slicing. Cut into feeder-size slices about 1 ¼ inch thick.
7. Store thawed cakes in fridge for up to 1 week or refreeze with a sheet of wax paper between slices.

Recipe #2

- 1 cup shortening such as Crisco
- 1 cup crunchy peanut butter
- 2 cups old-fashioned oatmeal
- 1 cup corn meal
- 2 cups bird seed

1. Melt shortening and peanut butter over medium heat—do not boil.
2. Stir in oatmeal
3. Stir in birdseed and cornmeal
4. Pack tight into containers
5. Wrap in foil
6. Freeze overnight
7. Carefully remove solid suet from containers
8. Store in fridge or freezer until ready to use

Suet cake recipe #1 is from whoneedsacape.com

The birdhouse craft and suet cake recipe #2 are from intelligentdomestications.com

QUICK AND EASY BIRDHOUSE

- 1 plastic milk jug
- 30 inches of thick string or very thin rope.

Directions:

1. Reattach cap.
2. Cut a 2-inch hole in the side of the jug about 2 inches from the bottom.
3. Make a small hole (slightly bigger than the diameter of your string) on each side of the top of the jug.
4. Thread one end of the string through one of the small holes, then thread the other end of the string through the opposite small hole.
5. Bring both ends of the string through the 2-inch hole and tie in a knot.
6. Pull the string back through the small holes until tight.
7. Decorate your milk jug as you wish. You can use dried or silk leaves, flowers, moss, fabric, paint or stickers. *Do this project with your small grandchildren and have a fun time. Let them use their imagination.*
8. Hang outside from a tree branch or a shepherd's crook.



RE-BLOOMING



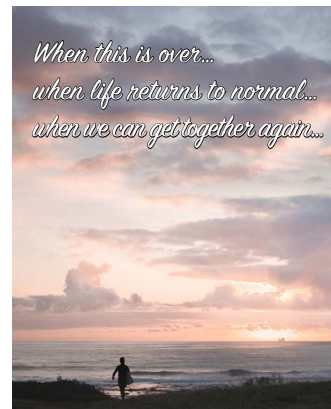
Feeling light within, I walk.....Navaho Night Chant

Merriam Webster says to chant is to recite in a monotonous, repetitive tone. Haven't we all been chanting?

While it has been a dark, uncertain year, we have moved through it with quiet determination, one step at a time, working and supporting each other as best we can. And now it is spring; darkness yielding to light.

Jan

We plant our seeds on warming soil, hopeful for beauty and bounty to come. Webster also says to chant is to celebrate in praise or song. That too we will do again. Together. Feeling light within, we walk.



SUNSHINE

As Sunshine Chairman I send cards to members who need a little brightening in their lives. Normally I share this news each month at our meeting so that others may reach out and offer support as well.

If you know of someone to whom we should send a card please contact me at HKoetz@comcast.net or (262) 237-1950.



Helen

Our deepest condolences to Diane Sheehan who lost her husband Terrence this February.

As an ongoing fundraiser, I also have our garden gloves for sale for \$4 a pair. They are very durable and make excellent gifts. Please let me know if you would like some.



MARCH BIRTHDAYS

JoNancy Warren	2	Jill LaBelle	28
Ula Wojcik	2	Barb Norman	28
Ingrid Tjader	6	Taylor Austin	29
Liz Perez	15		

What do you call
a fake diamond
in Ireland?
a Sham-Rock!

COMING NEXT MONTH

- Sprouts
- Microgreens
- Indoor seed starting
- New plants coming out
- Info on selling plants to benefit club

You can also find fun info on our Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/illinoisduneslandgardenclub

