ILLINOIS DUNESLAND GARDEN CLUB

Dunesland Latest Dirt

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May 2021

PRESIDENTS' POINTS

Have you noticed? It's spring! Lawns are green, perennials are popping out, and of course the weeds seem to spring up quickest of all.

All of which makes May such a busy month for gardeners. We shake the dirt off any tools we forgot to clean, work the creaks out of our knees and tackle the month with energy and expectation. We plan, we shop, we get our hands dirty (don't forget Helen has our wonderful gloves for sale) and dig into our gardens, be they huge vegetable gardens or a single pot on the deck. We are all gardeners this month!

Beth has been busy, too, as you can tell:

> *have been busy lately potting hostas that have outgrown their spaces, slicing daylily fans off some big clumps, digging monarda (bee balm) and pulmonaria (lungwort) that have gone too far astray, and potting up new lilium bulbs.*

> *hope you are doing the same with your extra plants for the upcoming on-line plant sale. No bidding, just select what you want to buy. Prices will be listed. Find directions on our website and our* ***Facebook page.***

As Beth mentions, if you haven't potted plants for the plant sale, do it now! Take pictures and post them on our Facebook page where the "how-to buy or sell" is listed. Be sure to alert family and friends who might like to buy something lovely for their gardens.

Another bit of good news—once again, The Village of Winthrop Harbor has asked us to plant flowers (***for a nice donation to our Club***). We need volunteers to come out and help us on **May 22nd**. It will only take a couple hours at most and you'll have a chance to get together (finally!) with some garden friends.

Beth's Corner *has some potluck salad recipes. While we won't be having our usual potluck this year, perhaps you can use them for a family gathering this summer.*

You will also find some ideas for 'going up' with your container gardening.

In the meantime, does anyone have any great ideas for keeping squirrels and chipmunks out of my newly potted pansies?

Let's use this month to break out of the old routine and really use our gardening abilities for ourselves and to benefit our community. One of the joys of gardening is sharing both our experience and our talents.

Enjoy your spring. It never seems to last long enough!

Sandi Beth

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HELP WANTED

This isn't exactly a job offer but we do need your help. Today begins our plant sale which takes the place of our annual plant auction. We have NO income for our club; all fund raising was halted by the pandemic and we won't even have dues since everyone took advantage of the two-years-for-one pricing.

SO... We need you to pot up your plants, take a picture and post it on our Facebook page with a description and price. When your plants sell, you arrange the pickup and collect the money, which you then donate to the club. This will benefit us, like the auction has in past years. If you don't want to sell or don't have anything to sell, you can always just make a donation.

We are a club; a group; a community. If we each put in a little effort, we can keep our over-80-year-old club intact. Thank you for your support.

HARDENING OFF PLANTS

"***Hardening Off***" is the process of allowing plants to adjust from pampered conditions indoors to the harsher conditions outdoors. If you do not allow your plants to adjust slowly, the shock from being placed outdoors all at once may cause them to die or under produce over time. What a waste of time after you nurtured those plants for so many weeks!

"***Hardening Off***" may take a week to 10 days. Make sure the weather is mild before you start the process.

The first few days you will be bringing plants outside in the morning then back inside. Every day gradually add more time outside for the plants to adjust. Here is the process:

Day 1	Place the plants in a sheltered, light-shade area out of the wind for 2-3 hours, then bring them inside.
Day 2 and 3	Repeat day 1, adding 2 hours a day.
Day 4	Water the plants well. Start them out in a sunny spot for 1-2 hours in the morning. Then move them to the shaded area for 6 hours.
Day 5 and beyond	Place the plants in the sun for longer periods each day. Every day add more time in the sun and less in the shade extending into the evening.

When nighttime temperatures are **50-60°** leave them outside in a sheltered spot until they are outside all day and all night to prepare them for transplanting. *(*see Transplanting below in the May Newsletter and the article online)*

TRANSPLANTING

Transplanting a plant into the garden soil is a fairly easy task. Items you will need include a trowel (or shovel for larger plants), compost soil, starter fertilizer and water. These steps are geared to planting a **perennial**, but the same is true for an annual plant. Let's look at this project step by step:

1. Decide on the spot you will be planting. We will focus on one plant in one garden area. Make sure the area is weed free.
2. Prior to planting make sure the plant is hardened off (plant needs to gradually acclimate to the outside temperature and climate), well-fed and watered.
3. Dig a hole one size larger than the plant pot is wide and tall. To the garden soil removed from the hole mix in composed soil and bit of starter fertilizer. To the bottom of the hole add a handful of the soil mix.
4. Remove the plant from the pot. Inspect the roots. If they are knotted in a tight ball, loosen them carefully. If there is soil left in the pot, add it to the soil mix.
5. Place the plant in the prepared hole. Add soil mix all around the plant firming it up little by little to eliminate air pockets. There should be enough soil to cover all the roots completely and above the root ball. Press firmly down on the soil once again.
6. Water around the plant carefully and fully. Do not blast the plant with water. Allow it to drain down, then dd a little more soil mix to the top if the roots are not fully covered. Add water again and allow to drain down. Do this one more time. You have completed your task.
7. Aftercare is necessary for all new plants. Water carefully each day until the plant becomes strong and well established. If you think rabbits, squirrels or deer will eat the plant you may need to fence it.

TOMATOES

What is the most popular fruit grown in our home gardens? You know it as a tomato. Botanically it is a fruit as are zucchini, peppers, cucumbers, beans and peas. Nutritionists call them all vegetables, mainly because we eat them as savory dishes. But by whatever classification, a tomato is what so many of us want to grow.

This month and next we're going to share some information with you that we've gathered from a number of experienced gardeners. Your first decision to **what kind** of tomato you plan to grow:

- In ground or
- Container

Which leads to:

- Determinate (most tomatoes ripen at the same time) or
- Indeterminate (larger, more sprawling, fruits produced and ripen until frost)

The *next* most important choice is **when to plant**. Tomatoes are warm-season plants. Do not set them out too early! Wait until all danger of frost has passed. Crops planted when the weather has settled usually catch up to those planted earlier. You can check average frost dates and when to plant with our handy planting calculator here. (Link)

OK. You have your plants, and you're ready to pop them in the ground. Dig a little hole and drop it in……Wait! Not so fast. Make sure you have first watered that tomato and that it has been **hardened off**. Then dig a **DEEP** hole because you are going to remove all of the leaves except the top couple of sets and put that whole stem in the hole. You can even lay it sideways and carefully curl the top to stand up. Roots will grow from the entire planted stem giving you a strong, healthy plant.

You will plant this way either in the ground or in a container. Now, let's talk more specifically about growing tomatoes in a container. (*Most of this is very similar for any container-grown vegetable*.)

Use a large enough container. A five-gallon bucket is an ideal container; a small barrel works as well. Do not use anything less than a deep 14" pot. Make sure it has a drainage hole.

- *Use potting soil or soilless mix completely to the bottom of the container.*
- *Water, water, water—sometimes twice a day in hot weather*
- *Feed them—feeding them well produces more and bigger fruits*
- *Stake them—all tomatoes need support*
- *These are the basics to get you started on your tomato garden journey.* ***Be sure to visit our website for detailed instructions for each step above.***

PLEASE CHECK OUT MAY'S EDITION OF MMG ONLINE FOR MORE IN-DEPTH INSTRUCTIONS ON GROWING TOMATOES IN A CONTAINER!

COMING NEXT MONTH we'll talk more about tomato care, specifically: Staking, Pruning and Insect and Disease Control

WORKSHOPS

Available for your viewing pleasure and guidance, we now have three perennial plant-dividing workshops on the club website. If you want a non-professional tutorial with your own club officers doing a sometimes-entertaining film, be sure to watch them. They are included in your membership!

So far, we have presented hostas, daylilies and iris so you can see the process for each type of plant. There is also a workshop about trimming plants back and starting new ones from the clippings. We are always adding more so keep checking back!

In a Leopold Garden Bench workshop, we actually make the bench step-by-step so it is easy to follow along and make it at home!

MIDWEST MONTHLY GARDENING

May is a wonderful month because it brings warmth and sunshine into the garden.

Exercising—Continue exercising and stretching.

Bulbs—Allow bulb leaves to die naturally time. Observe to determine what bulbs you may want to add next spring.

General Garden Chores—Finish any clean up. Prune only spring-flowering shrubs after blooming. Monitor plants for insect and disease problems. Stake tall perennials before they reach six inches.

Transplanting—Most plants can be transplanted into the garden once they have been hardened off.

Vegetables—Fertilize beds. Cool season vegetables can be planted now; warm season vegetables can be planted when temperatures reach 50° at night. Harvest rhubarb and asparagus.

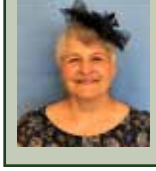
Roses—Fertilize and prune off any dead branches. A baking soda spray is a good preventative for mildew and black spot.

Watering—Be sure to water consistently to encourage strong growth.

Mulch—Placing mulch around new plantings supports healthier plants as well as helps to reduce weeds and retain moisture. Black plastic and landscape fabrics are inorganic mulches which do not break down or enrich the soil.

Lawn Care—Fertilize now if you haven't yet (basic mix of 20-5-10) Spot-spray weedy areas with a broadleaf week killer if needed. Mow the grass when it's dry. Remove one third or less of the leaf blade for each mowing.

PLEASE CHECK OUT MAY'S EDITION OF MMG ONLINE FOR MORE IN-DEPTH GARDENING TIPS AND INSTRUCTIONS



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. Send her an email and she will get back to you.

— April

CONTAINER GARDENING

Container gardening is easy, fun, and accessible to anyone.

A huge space is not necessary to garden, not even a yard. All you need is a patio, a deck or even a front stoop. With a few containers you can create your own little oasis with little cash outlay. You don't need professional help or specialty plants—just take a walk down the aisles of your favorite garden center this spring and choose wisely.

PLEASE CHECK OUT MAY'S EDITION OF ONLINE FOR A BONUS ORNAMENTAL CONTAINER ARTICLE

You can create ornamental plantings, or fruit/vegetable containers or even combine them.

1. *Consider the location—sun or shade and choose plants accordingly. Vegetables need six to eight hours of sun a day. Ornamentals often need less.*
2. *Next, the container. This can be anything from one bought at a garden center to a bucket you have sitting in the garage as long as it's deep enough and has drainage holes in the bottom.*
3. *Fill the container with potting soil or a commercial soil-less mix. Do not use garden soil or topsoil.*
4. *Plan the structure of your pot. The easiest way is to remember "thriller, filler, spiller"—a tall focal point, mid height broad plant, and then trailing plants. The number depends on the size of your container.*
   - *Another composition would be just one bold plant in the pot.*
   - *A third way might be to choose several of the same plant for the pot.*
   - *Whatever style you decide on, make sure the plants all have similar soil, light and water needs.*
   - *Contrast textures—foliage color, shape and texture are as important as blooms. The size and shape of the leaf as well as its texture (shiny, prickly, velvety) influences the overall appearance of your pot.*
5. *Think color—paint with your plants. Reflect on your house or patio color; blend soothingly or stand out strikingly? Different color combinations set widely varying moods: Complimentary color such as orange and blue generate excitement. Create a soothing environment with related colors like pinks and blues. Or consider a sophisticated look only greens, silvers and whites.*
6. *Have you considered a hanging pot of strawberries? You can even grow dwarf blueberries, blackberries, raspberries and other varieties in big pots.*
7. *So you're now ready to plant. You can use seeds or seedlings.*
8. *After that, water them lovingly (that means "don't forget them") according to their needs. Vegetables will need much more water than ornamental flowers.*
9. *Make sure you remember to harvest what you've grown*—maybe a little bouquet in a vase and certainly the vegetables or fruit for your table.

With just a little thought and planning, you can display your own original, unique—yes, spectacular—pots; then sit back, and enjoy the compliments.

Beth's Corner

Recipes

BRUSSELS SPROUT SALAD

For the salad:

2 ounces pancetta or bacon, chopped
2 cups shaved brussels sprouts, about ¾ pound
½ cup Marcona almonds
¼ cup shaved parmesan

For the dressing:

2 tablespoon champagne vinegar
1 teaspoon shallots, finely minced
2 tablespoons olive oil
½ lemon, juiced
Salt to taste
1 teaspoon dijon mustard
¼ teaspoon ground pepper
½ teaspoon agave syrup or sugar
¼ tsp Worcestershire Sauce

Instructions:

1. Cook the pancetta/bacon. Heat a small skillet over medium-low heat; add pancetta/bacon and cook for 10-12 minutes or until crisp. Remove from pan with a slotted spoon and place on a plate lined with paper towels to drain.
2. Shred the brussels sprouts. Remove the tough outer leaves from the brussels sprouts. Using a mandoline, shave the brussels sprouts (***if you don't have a mandoline, you can slice them by hand or use a food processor***). Place shaved brussels sprouts in a medium bowl.
3. Make the dressing. Whisk the vinegar, mustard, lemon juice, shallots, agave (or sugar) and pepper together in a small bowl. Add olive oil and whisk until combined. Be sure to adjust to your taste -- you may like it sweeter or more acidic. (**NOTE: If you don't have champagne vinegar, use lightest vinegar you have**)
4. Assemble the salad. Add the almonds, shaved cheese and pancetta to the brussels sprouts. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss to coat.

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

CRUNCHY COLESLAW

⅓ cup vegetable oil
1 pkg (3 oz) beef-flavored ramen noodles
¼ tsp garlic salt
1 pkg (16oz) shredded coleslaw mix
1 pkg (5 oz) sliced almonds

1. Stir contents of noodle seasoning packet, garlic salt, and oil until blended.
2. Crush the noodles and place in a bowl. Add coleslaw mix and almonds.
3. Drizzle with oil mixture and toss to coat.
4. Serve immediately.

Note: If taking to a potluck, add dressing at the site, so the noodles don't get soggy.

Craft Ideas

Beth's Corner

GROW UP WITH YOUR CONTAINERS

Don't forget that you can grow a lot of vegetables upright. Tomatoes need support. Put a large cage on your tomato plant in a big pot—the bigger the better. The tomato can be staked with a wooden stake. Put a few large headed (roofing) nails in the stake to hold the ties as the plant grows. And tomatoes look great on an obelisk. Place the pot in a flower bed and listen to the compliments.

Cucumbers, pole beans, vining squash, vining spinach can all be grown up. Give them a trellis or a tee-pee. A simple trellis can be made with two sturdy stakes with fencing stapled to it. Be sure that your stakes are close enough together to fit inside the pot. If you place the pot directly on the ground the stakes can be pounded into the ground on the outside of the pot (the pot will not be movable if this is done). Any of these plants will do well on a trellis.

Tee-pees are fairly easy to do. Bamboo stakes work the best. Put five or six stakes in a large pot and tie the top of them together with a heavy string. Pole bean or squash seeds can be planted on the inside and the outside of the tee-pee and trained up on each stake. String can be strung horizontally around the stakes to make it easier for the plants to climb.

Malabar Spinach

There is a large leaf vining spinach called *Malabar Spinach* that has tiny purple flowers that makes a great looking plant and is edible, too. Again, with an obelisk, you'll have a great addition to your garden.

https://balconygardenweb.com/best-vegetables-to-grow-in-pots-most-productive-vegetables/

WEEDS / MULCH

It's spring and weeds are springing!

A common gardener's saying is that a weed is "just a plant growing in the wrong place." We know there are a number of weeds that are edible or used medicinally such as purslane and dandelions. Nevertheless, we don't want them in our garden beds.

Well, why not? Mostly we don't like the way they look, but more importantly, they compete with our plants for water and nutrients. If big enough, they can shade and crowd out the desired plants.

We know we'll never totally get rid of weeds so how can we manage them?

Don't wait—early and often is the best way to go about weeding. Do a thorough weeding in early spring. After that, pull whatever you notice as you check your beds. You will find it surprisingly easy to keep up in this manner.

Do pull weeds before they flower or go to seed to slow down weed coverage.

Don't wait very long to apply mulch. If you don't cover the earth, nature will fill the void with weeds. But avoid the temptation to use too much. Just three inches deep is enough to keep weeds down, but still allow air and water to reach the roots of your perennials.

Do use shredded bark, bark chunks or pine straw for mulching perennial beds. Straw or grass clippings work well in vegetable gardens. Use a thicker layer of mulch on paths to keep from compressing the soil.

Don't make mulch volcanoes around trees and shrubs. Leave a few inches open to prevent disease and pest infestation.

Do follow these suggestions to enjoy your (nearly) weed free garden this year.

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

As the days get warmer, I start dreaming about a summer vacation. Often, my family will pack up and set off in our pop-up camper to stay a few nights in one of our national or state parks. The natural places in our country hold so much beauty! This year we probably won't be heading out (maybe next year?) but that's OK, because I'm working on making my own little park -- right in my backyard!

We can't bring mountains or oceans to Illinois, but we can use our personal spaces to house some of the things that make Illinois beautiful. Have a sunny spot? Try making your own micro-prairie! You may not have space for a huge tall-grass prairie, but there are quite a few native prairie plants that can do the job in a suburban yard: **Black-eyed susan**(*Rudbeckia hirta*), **Coneflower** (*Echinacea purpurea*), **Little bluestem** (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), **Coreopsis** (*Coreopsis leavenworthii*), **Blazing Star** (*Liatris*), **Butterfly weed** (*asclepias tuberosa*), or **Anise hyssop** (*Agastache foeniculum*) to name a few.

Does your "personal park" need to stay in pots on a patio? That's OK too! Try **Wild blue phlox** (*phlox divaricata*), s**wamp milkweed** (*asclepias incarnata*), **turtlehead** (*chelone*), **cardinal flower** (*Lobelia cardinalis*), or even some of our *native ferns*.

Your little state park will attract our Illinois butterflies, hummingbirds, songbirds... And you'll have access to it whenever you like!

RE-BLOOMING

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring—
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush…

Gerard Manley Hopkins

The weeds have arrived. Are we celebrating their beauty? In my garden they preceded the snowdrops. I'm not sure they ever really left. While weeds compete with desired plants for space and nutrients—and we do battle—you have to admire their tenacity. And appreciate the irony: they thrive unassisted while we labor to keep favored plants alive.

In spring we envision glorious gardens, abundant with blooms and edibles, weed-free and picture-perfect. By September we're often waving the white flag of surrender. Undaunted, we repeat the ritual year after year…planting, weeding, harvesting…with pleasure.

In his poem "Spring" Hopkins asks, "What is all this juice and all this joy?" As we busy ourselves with the tasks at hand it's good to pause and consider the question. Writing from my second-floor perch I watch a robin building her nest in the crook of a downspout. Outside my window the pear, serviceberry and crabapple trees are bursting with blossoms. Tulips, daffodils and bluebells dance in the perfumed breeze. So beautiful.

Jan