



WISCONSIN MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

Winter Protection of Landscape Plants from Animals

— Dr. Dr. Leonard Perry, Horticulture Professor, University of Vermont

With all the hard work gardeners put into planting and caring for trees and shrubs, including fruit plants, the last sight you want to see in spring is plants that have been gnawed by mice or eaten by deer. A little time invested in some fall protection from animal browsing will help ensure your precious plants make it to spring.

Damage to landscape plants occurs when animals, trying to find food in winter, dine on plant bark. This is where nutrients and water are shuttled through the plant, so when it

is chewed off of trunks and stems, these die. The more a trunk or branch is “girdled”, or with bark removed around it, the less chance the plant has to survive.

Mice tend to live in tall grass, straw, or mulch around plants, from where they do their damage. So an easy control is to keep these away from trunks, and grass mowed around plants. You can use mouse baits, but these poisons can harm non-target animals too, like pets or even children. If using, keep in boxes or containers with small (one inch wide) holes that mice can enter but larger animals can’t reach. Such containers are good for mousetraps too, baited with peanut butter.

Rabbits, on the other hand, tend to walk on a compacted snow surface and feed from there higher up on plants. So for them, you can wrap trunks with tree wrap, a plastic tree guard, or cylinder of hardware cloth mesh. If using a wire

mesh cylinder for mice, make sure it extends a few inches below the soil level and, for rabbits, 18 to 24 inches above the snow level.

You can spray taste repellents on plant stems too, but if the rabbits (or deer) are hungry enough they will eat even obnoxious tasting or smelling plants to stay alive. You may need to spray again in midwinter higher up on plants if the snow gets deep.

If you have a whole bed of shrubs, you can fence this in with chicken wire mesh. Again, make sure this extends well beyond the snow level. To keep rabbits from burrowing underneath, affix the mesh to the ground with “ground staples” you can find online or at complete home or landscape stores (6-inch long wire staples). If there’s not much other food around, rabbits can dig underneath such mesh, so you’ll have to bury it several inches into the soil.

— continued on page 2

inside

Winter Mulch-----	2
WIMGA Grants-----	3
MGA Seed Trials-----	4
Resources-----	6
WIMGA Director Rod	
Bohn-----	6
Events-----	7
2016 Conference-----	7
Dues Reminder-----	7
Contacts-----	8

Animal Protection

Continued from Page 1

If there is alternative food nearby for deer, as in wild areas, repellents may be all that is necessary. There are quite a few good commercial taste or odor repellent products you can buy and spray on plants, and that will last many weeks. Some soak old rags in the repellent and hang among plants.

Alternatively, home remedies including hanging

human hair in old socks or cloth bags among plants, or using smelly soap bars in these instead. Just make sure not to hang the soap directly on plants, as the dissolving solution will attract mice to eat the bark. Such smells work by interfering with the deer's acute sense of smell and so of smelling potential danger nearby.

If there are many deer or they're ravenous, repellents may not work and you may need to resort to fencing. Start

with some form of line about 4 feet high placed around plants, hung with white flagging (which simulates scared white-tailed deer in flight). If this doesn't work, you may need to resort to electric fencing (baited with peanut butter in foil wrap), or higher mesh deer fencing. If just a few individual shrubs such as hydrangeas or fruits such as pear trees to protect, you can place stakes around them and wrap with 6-foot high mesh deer netting.

Education

Mulching Perennials for Winter

In our harsh climate some plants need a little help to make it through most winters. Mulching not only protects perennial plants from extreme temperatures, but also can prevent repeated freezing and thawing of soil that causes plants to "heave" out of the ground and damages their roots.

To make it easier to apply and remove mulch, it is best to cut down the stems of taller plants. Most perennials are best cut back after a killing frost in the fall, usually in late September or early October. Clean off all plant debris after the frost to help minimize soil-borne diseases.

A layer of mulch 4-6" deep is best for most perennials. The purpose of mulching in fall is to protect the crowns of the plants from the alternate freezing and thawing that occurs very late in fall and in early spring, not to keep the plants warm. The trick is not to mulch too soon. Mulching needs to be done after the ground starts to

freeze but before the first significant snowfall of the year. Mulching sooner may allow mice and other rodents to nest in the mulch, and plants may not be completely dormant. Generally it is best to wait until early to mid-November before covering the plants. Ideally an inch or two of frost in the ground is best.

Snow is a great insulator and the easiest way to protect plants, but not all areas have reliable snow cover. There are several mulches that work well for winter protection of perennials. Any loose, insulating material will do. Since the mulch will need to be removed in spring, choose a material that's easy to handle. Straw, hay, leaves, and evergreen boughs are the most common.

Straw is the stems of wheat or oat plants and is usually a bright golden-yellow in color. The advantages of straw are that it doesn't pack and it insulates well because its hollow stems trap air. The disadvantage of straw is that it takes a relatively long time to break down in the compost pile.

Hay includes the leaves of plants, usually grasses such as Timothy or canary. Hay is a good insulator and will break down

readily when composted. It does tend to pack down and may contain weed seeds.

Leaves from most trees and shrubs can be used as mulch, but they tend to mat down and turn into a block of ice. Avoid walnut leaves, but pine needles are ok and less likely to mat. Leaves are inexpensive, usually readily available, offer good insulation, and compost readily.

Evergreen boughs make an excellent winter mulch because they don't pack down and help to collect and hold snow in place. They can also be used on top of straw to prevent it from blowing away.

There are a few exceptions to mulching perennials. Bearded iris should either go without mulch, or be mulched extremely late, to reduce problems with iris borer. If you have had any disease problems with your peonies, leave them unmulched as well.

Wait until all the frost is out of the ground before removing the mulch in the spring. The mulch can be removed entirely or just pulled away from the crown of the plants. This adds organic matter and helps suppress weeds. Mulches that have been removed can be composted.

Free Planting Workshop for Kids

— by Vicky Hopp, Washington Co. MGV

The Washington Co. MGA offered a free planting workshop during the West Bend Farmer's Market to introduce kids and their parents to growing plants. A \$100 WIMGA grant was used to purchase supplies so that participants could choose sunflower or watermelon seeds to plant in

paper cups. After filling the cup with soil from a wheel barrow, MGVs helped the children plant their choice of seeds. Parents and kids were instructed what to do with the cup once they got home, and MGVs offered advice on growing conditions, plant spacing, and mulching once the seeds germinated.

Over 80 children participated in this project. Many had never planted seeds before, and now were excited about growing plants. The joy of planting seeds was also very rewarding to the MGVs assisting them, as for many this was their first volunteer experience after the training class.

Park Flower Beds Restored

— by Cindy Arndt, Grant Co. MGV

Some of the flower beds in Marsden Park in Fennimore have been restored or replanted thanks to a \$250 WIMGA grant. The main focus was the complete redesign of a perennial bed to offer a child-friendly sensory garden. MGVs and community

partners helped design, dig up, plant, mulch and weed the redesigned garden. The new garden invites children into the garden with stepping stones made by members of the Stitzer Go Getters 4-H Club and Kiddie Caboose Family Daycare. The grant was also

used to purchase perennials for other beds in the park. The garden and beds are a work in progress — signs, which are being created by students, are not up yet — but eventually will help educate a new generation of gardeners.

Food Garden Rebuilt

— by Geraldine Hughes, Lake Superior MGV

With the help of a \$400 WIMGA grant, Lake Superior MGVs were able to build new beds in the Solid Rock Mission's Food Garden. MGVs work in this community garden, growing food for the hungry and offering regular gardening advice to the public throughout the summer. MGV Dick Coda came up with the building specifications to replace existing rotted wooden beds, and supplied the power tools. He also gave a presen-

tation on the "how-to" part along with the materials needed to complete the project. The grant allowed us to purchase building materials and bottled water for the MGVs and members of the public who came out to the demonstrations and work days. MGVs (and a few husbands pressed into service)

built two 36' x 4' beds during two sessions in June. With two beds completed now, our plan is to build two beds each season until we finish rebuilding all eight beds there.



St. Croix Valley MGA Seed Trials

— Peg Wastell, St. Croix Valley MGV

The Saint Croix MGA shared two years of Seed Trials results and a peek at this year's results in a display at the WIMGA state conference in La Crosse this summer. Our goal was to share our information, inspire more MGVs to participate as growers, and encourage other associations to join us sponsoring seed trials. So many people were enthusiastic and asked what the trials were and what made us start this project. Answering questions about the trials gave me pause and I thought back on how this idea all started.

Back in July 31 of 2012 the MN Dakota Co. MGs hosted an educational event, "Super Tuesday", at the Dakota Co. fairgrounds. MGV Carolyn Barrette and I, along with several other MGVs from our association, took a road trip over the river to enjoy the evening watching demonstrators of various horticultural topics. Part of the grounds included lovely gardens and a vegetable trial garden. MN MGV Marc Battistini answered our questions concerning vegetable trials. The results of their trials from all over MN were published each year in the March/April issue of Northern Gardener. We all thought it was a wonderful idea. Carolyn and I talked about the trials we had been part of in Wisconsin and how we would change those trials if Extension offered them again.

Somehow during our ride back to Wisconsin we decided to see if there would be an interest in doing home gardener trials here. Thus the idea to have a Seed Trials Group was one of those brainstorming that happen when you put a bunch of excited MGVs together. Our association was experimenting with a small group



Peg Wastell with project display at the WIMGA conference.

format and here was another idea for one. Carolyn contacted Marc and he encouraged us with advice and forms we could adapt for our use. A group of interested MGVs did research, used advice from Diana Alfuth, our Horticulture educator, and came up with our first Seed Trials. Input from many MGVs was used to develop guidelines for Seed Trials. The purpose of these trials is to grow specific vegetable, herb, and flower varieties, evaluate, and share information. Evaluation data includes germination rate, growing habits, flavor, size, color, and texture.

Many SCV MGVs participated as growers and turned in their evaluations in 2013 and 2014. In 2014 we also invited MGVs from the Western District to take part in our seed trials as growers. We had 40 MGVs grow, evaluate, and send in results in 2014. Their

private gardens were located in Amery, Baldwin, Balsam Lake, Barronett, Bay City, Beldenville, Centuria, Chippewa Falls, Colfax, Elmwood, Glenwood City, Hager City, Hammond, Houlton, Hudson, Menomonie, Onalaska, River Falls, Roberts, Somerset, Tomah, and Viroqua. More MVGs growing vegetable, herb, and flower trials gives us a larger pool of data resulting in more scientific basis to compiled evaluations. Results from MGVs also have more "weight" because of our training and experience which is why trials are open only to MGVs. Diana has pointed out that even "bad" results, such as crop failures, are worth compiling so all growers who turn in evaluations are adding to results. MGVs count time spent filling in evaluation forms as volunteer hours.

We limit ourselves to 8 different kinds of vegetables each year with about 4 varieties of each vegetable. Our group chose six vegetables, one herb and one flower each year. When selecting varieties we try to have: tried and true, middle of the road, new, and open pollinated. Different plant families are used in trials for greater variety. Recognition of plants favored by gardeners



and space limits in home gardens are also reflected in our seed choices. Diana suggested we retrial one type of plant each year to add to our body of scientific information and to make up for poor growing years. For 2015 we are retrialing

bush green beans using the top two varieties from the 2013 trial and two additional varieties. In 2016 we will be retrialing

— continued on page 5

Seed Trials

Continued from Page 4

carrots using that same format. The amount of seed for each trial is kept at a small amount to enable home gardeners to take part in trials and keep trials affordable. Growing instructions and evaluation forms are sent out with seeds and are available on the SCVMGA website.

The SCVMGA donates seed to community gardens who then plant seed trial gardens. These gardens are open to the public. Each community garden has a sign and yearly updated seed trial information. Participating community gardens are Baldwin Community Garden (CG), Houlton Elementary CG, Hudson Hospital and Clinics CG, New Richmond CG, and UW-Extension Demonstration and Learning Garden in River Falls. Actually seeing four varieties of the same kind of plant growing next to each other allows visitors to observe differences. MGVs have used these gardens as a way to educate the public on vegetable growing and how to select good varieties. Students from St. Ann's school have enjoyed participating in taste evaluations at New Richmond CG. All seed left over from trials is donated to community gardens.

Our data is collected and presented for MGVs on our website (scvmga.weebly.com/garden-groups-of-scvmga.html). Results for 2013 and 2014, along with evaluation forms for 2015, are posted there, so MGVs can share with everyone.



We communicate the trial results to the general public through our community trial gardens and displays at Pierce Co. and St. Croix Co. Fairs.

This project was showcased in the fall 2014 edition of the Eau Claire Leader Telegram newspaper magazine *Home Front*. The article, *Growing Wisdom – Area Gardeners Conducting Plant Trials* (at eauclaireleadertelegram.wi.newsmemory.com/special.php?pSetup=eauclaireleadertelegram_homefront&date=20140816) was a great opportunity to publicize the seed trials to a wider audience, as well as to promote the MG Program locally.

There are many ways to participate in the seed trials group other than growing and evaluating trials. Each September a group of interested MGV growers meet to decide what varieties to trial in the next year. Writing growing instructions and evaluation forms for each trial are another way to participate. The 2016 Seed Trials order form will be available on our website and in Western District association

newsletters in January. Orders are due at the end of January so there is time to order from seed companies. Each February/early March we divide seeds into individual packets. Many volunteers make this task go more quickly. Filling orders and preparing mailing is also done in February/early March. We schedule seed dividing and order filling as soon as all seed is

shipped in. Counting seeds is truly a labor of love and patience, but it offers us a reason to get together — and what a fun way to get volunteer hours in during February! Emails are sent out to all our growers during the growing year with updates and reminders. Evaluation forms are filled in and sent to our extension office. Compiling and summarizing the results end our year for seed trials.

Activities like SCVMGA Seed Trials take a group effort to make happen. The Association subsidizes part of the costs, and their sponsorship allows purchase



of newer and more expensive varieties while keeping costs down to \$1.50 per trial plus postage and handling. Our members volunteer in so many ways to get the seed trials to the growers. Each grower agrees to grow all four varieties

in each trial in a consistent and equal way ensuring good data for evaluation. Filling out evaluation forms and sending them in is another step in getting our results out to share with everyone. Sharing the Seed Trial results at WIMGA state conference reminded me of all those volunteer hands taking part along the way, making it possible.

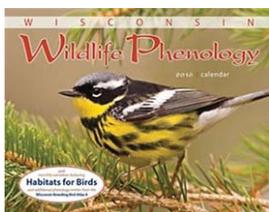
A MGV at one of the county fairs mentioned how growing and evaluating seed trials made her feel more like a MGV. Sharing our observations and growing wisdom is why many of us became MGVs. Those of you in the Western District look for our 2016 order form, sign up and share your wisdom! And those of you in other districts can think about doing a similar project in your area!

Wisconsin Wildlife Phenology Calendar

Phenology is the study of periodic plant and animal life-cycle events in nature that are influenced by climate and seasonal change, such as wildlife emerging from hibernation, birds nesting or migrating, and flowers blooming.

Each year the Wisconsin Wildlife Phenology Calendar is produced in a partnership between the Aldo Leopold Foundation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife, and UW-Extension. Aldo Leopold recorded phenological events in Sauk County, Wisconsin beginning in 1936 and later translated some of these observations into his famous book, *A Sand County Almanac*. The dates in this calendar are based on Leopold's data, data gathered more recently by his daughter, Nina Leopold Bradley, and data collected by other natural resource professionals. The 2016 calendar is focused on habitats for birds, with a magnolia warbler on the cover.

Order your calendar from UW-Extension's The Learning Store at learningstore.uwex.edu/Wildlife-Phenology-Calendar-P1382.aspx.



Walworth Co. MGA Calendar

This is the second year the Walworth Co. MGA has produced a calendar as a fundraising project. The proceeds from sales go to a local scholarship fund for graduating high school seniors pursuing a degree in horticulture or a related field. The new 2015-2016 calendar is full of beautiful pictures taken by MGVs and includes one gardening tip or famous quote for each month. Large blocks on the 8 x 11 inch hangable calendar have plenty of space to record your MG volunteer activities or continuing education hours. The cost is \$15 and orders must be submitted by December 1, 2015. To get your own copy, find the order form at <http://walworth.uwex.edu/horticulture/master-gardeners/>



WIMGA Director Rod Bohn

Rod Bohn, 81, of Sturgeon Bay, died suddenly Thursday evening, September 17, 2015, after suffering an apparent stroke early Thursday.



Rod loved gardening and especially raising orchids. He became a Door Co. MG in 1997 and was very active in the Door Co. Master Gardener Association (DCMGA), and in later years at the state level. He was on the DCMGA education committee that was instrumental in developing the innovative Level 1 training program offered in Door Co. He also served as DCMGA's local representative to WIMGA since 2004, and participated in many WIMGA Board activities, including as the WIMGA Vice President for three years. He was on the state Board as an At-Large Director and member of the MG Program Advisory Committee at the time of his death.

He is survived by his wife, Eileen of Sturgeon Bay, three sons, and seven grandchildren. Condolences can be offered online at www.huehnsfuneralhome.com. If desired, donations may be made to Feed America or the organization of your choice.

events

See the MG website for more events and details

November 2015.....



5

Hostas, Companion Plants
Olbrich BG, Madison, WI
By Dane Co. UWEX Lisa Johnson.
6:30-8. \$15. (608) 246-4550.



7

Naturally Creative
Rotary BG, Janesville, WI
Fall symposium, 3 speakers, 9-3:30.
\$70 for MGVs. 608-752-3885, ext.17



17

Late Season Interest
Rotary BG, Janesville, WI
With Mark Dwyer, 6:30-8pm. \$10.
(608) 752-3885, ext.17



19

Vernacular Gardens
Olbrich BG, Madison, WI
Creative gardens of everyday folk,
6:30-8. \$15. (608) 246-4550.



27 - Dec 30

Garden of Lights
GBBG, Green Bay, WI
Botanical themed displays Fri, Sat,
Sun 5-9. (920) 491-3691 ext 103.

December 2015



5-31

Holiday Express
Olbrich BG, Madison, WI
Flowers + model train show. Daily
10-4. \$3. (608) 246-4550.



11-Jan 3

Holiday Light Show
Rotary BG, Janesville, WI
4-8pm. Thurs-Sun. (608) 752-3885.

Planning Ahead



Jan 13-15, 2016

Northern Green EXPO
Minneapolis, MN
northerngreenexpo.org/



Jan 15-17, 2016

Mid-Am Hort Show
Chicago, IL
Largest hort show in Midwest. See
www.midam.org/



Jan 22-23, 2016

Garden Visions
Wausau, WI
Conference by North Central WI
MGA. Call Carol at (715) 693-6446.



Jan 30, 2016

Harmony with Nature
20th annual Wild Ones conference,
8-4:15, \$30+ by Jan 22. Info at www.
towardharmonywithnature.org/



Jan 30-31, 2016

Orchid Quest 2016
Madison, WI
Largest orchid show in the Midwest.
At Alliant Energy Center, 10-5/4.
www.orchidguild.org/orchid-quest.
html



Feb 12-14, 2016

WPT's Garden Expo
Madison, WI
Sponsored by WI Public TV, with
400 booths, seminars, Admission
fee charged.



Feb 21-March 1, 2016

MG Tour to Costa Rica
Educational study trip to the tropics.
See website or contact Susan Mahr.
Registration deadline Nov 20!



Feb 27, 2016

Green Up Your Winter Blues
Port Washington, WI
By PWGC, 8-3. See www.
portgardenclub.org/



Sept 14-17, 2016

Midwest Regional MG Conf
Wisconsin Dells, WI
More details in future newsletter or
at midwestmgconference.wordpress.
com/



July 10-14, 2017

International MG Conf
Portland, Oregon
Online at blogs.oregonstate.
edu/2017imgc/

2016 Midwest Regional MG Conference

Helping Nature Thrive: Gardeners at the Dells

— September 14-17, 2016 —

WI Dells, WI

There will not be an annual WIMGA conference in 2016; instead plan to attend the Midwest Regional Conference hosted by WIMGA, featuring area garden tours, educational sessions, expert speakers, and the WIMGA annual meeting and ice cream social!

All details at :
midwestmgconference.
wordpress.com/

Have YOUR local program listed here!

Most MG associations host public events, such as plant sales, local or regional symposia, or gardening classes for the public. Many of you also belong to other organizations that host their own programs that would be of interest to MGVs.

If you know of a horticulture-related event that you would like publicized on the MG website and possibly in this newsletter, all you have to do is send the information to the Program Coordinator! Be sure to send:

- the title of your event
- the date and times
- the location (city at least)
- a brief description
- a contact person (including email and/or phone number)

Dues Reminder

Don't forget that the deadline for submitting WIMGA dues (\$5) to the WIMGA Treasurer (NOT the Program Office) is January 15, 2016. If you belong to an association, they should collect and submit your dues — and they probably have an earlier deadline to allow time to get everything organized and mailed in. If you want to continue to receive this newsletter after January, make sure you pay your dues by the deadline!



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Address Service Requested



November 2015 Newsletter

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The Wisconsin Master Gardener Association

Newsletter is published 6 times a year (January, March, May, July, September and November) dedicated to providing horticulture education and information about the Master Gardener program to state association members. The newsletter is compiled and published for the WIMGA in the Horticulture Department at the UW - Madison.

Articles, artwork and ideas are welcome, but final selection and editing are the responsibility of the editorial staff. Submissions and comments should be addressed to the editor.