



Quail's Tales

President's Preface

April, 2008

About this "spring" thing—I'm not so sure. Snow is still in my backyard covering twigs I could pick up for the yard waste service that starts this coming week. Maybe it would be better just to wait.

However, several weeks ago snow drops were indeed evident through the snow. Robins hopping along lawns, birds singing, a pair of ducks in my neighbor's pond are signs of spring. So will be the nesting blue herons when we go to the rookery for our Trowel and Error this month. With all these signs, guess spring is here.

April would be for seriously planning our outdoor gardening and trying to remember how the sodden brown mess that is now a flower bed can become a thing of beauty in a month or two's time. But that happens every year.

Remember the state MCG meeting is May 19 in Ann Arbor.

Mar, Lisa and Sally welcome your suggestions for scholarships, gardening endeavors, etc. that we as a club can contribute to.

Congratulations to everyone who participated in the District I standard flower show.

PS: Looks like the rain melted most of my snow, though there are a few patches left.
--Sandy C

April 10 meeting

Herbs from Head to Toe presented by Coleen French, who owns French Garden Creations. Don't just look at your garden this summer. Be ready to put your garden to work. Come and learn several ways to use herbs you grow to make your own hair conditioner, eye creams, facial masks, skin toners, foot powders and more. Handouts include recipes for turning your garden plants into your own de-it-yourself spa. Everyone will get a personal scent to take home.

We'll be looking for volunteers to set up and tear down a Hill and Dale display for the Cultural Arts Festival April 22 and 27. And a delegate from the club for the district meeting, April 15.

Nominations for 2008-2009

The nominating committee is presenting the following slate of officers for the new year, beginning in August: President, Peggy Dapkus; Vice President-Program Chair, Sally Ouellette; Recording Secretary, Chris Sechler; Treasurer, Carol Smith. Nominations from the floor will also be entertained with elections to follow in May.

Minutes of March 13 meeting

We'll review them at the April meeting.

Junior Gardeners

The date is changed to April 26. Lu Eaton is looking for small sea shells to glue around the edges of mirrors.

Dues are due

Pay Carol Smith \$25 for regular membership.

Evenings in the Garden 2008

MSU Extension-Oakland County in cooperation with the Tollgate Garden Volunteers presents educational workshops throughout the spring and summer. Workshops are

- Pruning Trees and Shrubs, April 15
- Wonderful Native Grasses and Wildflowers, April 28
- Native Trees and Shrubs, May 20
- Flowering Vines: Clematis and Beyond, June 30
- Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Hydrangeas, July 10
- Ten Things People Need to Know About Their Lawns, August 11
- Cooking with Herbs, August 13
- Keeping It Safe from Garden to Plate, August 27
- Lavender—How to Grow and Use, September 16.

Classes are set for MSU Tollgate Education Center, 28115 Meadowbrook Road, Novi, 48377. Classes will run from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Registration fee is \$20 per class except for Lavender class, which is \$25. To register contact Linda at 248.858.0887 or smithlin@oakgov.com.

Coming Up

April 15—File those taxes early and spend the day at the District 1 spring meeting.

April 21 Lathrup Village Dr. David Michener speaking on More Garden, Less Lawn 6:30 in the community room of the village Municipal Building. (\$5 donation)

May 8 -10—Flower Show School will be held at the Radisson Detroit-Livonia. Since the club voted to provide a year's subscription to the National Gardener for all members, this is the chance to learn about judging flower shows right near home. Sally Ouellette is providing horticulture for study and may need your assistance with **bulb blooms** and broad leaf evergreen branches.

May 19—MGC state convention in Ann Arbor.

June 13-14—Livonia Garden Club presents "Bookworms," a standard flower show at the Livonia Civic Center Library atrium, 32777 Five Mile Road, Livonia.

June 19—Comerica Bank Wellness Expo on Comerica's Livonia campus. Hill and Dale is invited to host a table from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and from 6 to 9 p.m. Participants are wellness vendors, and we all know that there's nothing healthier than digging around in the dirt. This would be an excellent way to promote the club to potential new members. Mar will be looking for volunteers at the general meeting.

October 7—District 1 fall meeting.

Horticulture

WINTER ACONITES

Eranthis hyemalis

*For I'm called Little Buttercup--dear little Buttercup,
Though I could never tell why,
But still I'm called Buttercup --poor little Buttercup,
Sweet Little Buttercup I!*

--Gilbert and Sullivan

This winter has been especially long and cold. Did we think spring would ever come? But the sight of the buttercup yellow of the winter aconite blooming in the snow brightens my day.

I received my plant from Carol Grentzel a few years ago, and every year the clump gets bigger and more beautiful. This year it is blooming with my purple crocus and it is stunning. I have it planted by the walk as you come up to the front door. So I see it coming and going every day. It is a very small flowering plant, so having it close to your house is imperative.

Winter aconite, or Eranthis hyemalis is an early blooming member of the buttercup or Ranunculaceae family. They are poisonous so don't allow children or pets near them. They should be planted in the late summer or early fall. Purchased tubers may be shriveled, so soak them before planting them.

These plants prefer humus-rich, well-drained soil, planted at a depth of 3" and approximately 3" apart. Plant them in full sun or part shade, mulching them to keep them moist. The foliage dies down after flowering, so remember where they are, so you don't disturb them. I place a rock over them after they die down, so I know where they are. You can plant shallow rooted annuals over them. They work well with hellobores and witch hazel, also blooming now. They look especially nice with snowdrops, or Galanthus. This bulb blooms at the same time and the white dangling flowers of snowdrops look very attractive with the yellow blooms of the aconite. Snowdrops are planted in the late fall with your tulips and daffodils. Look for both of these bulbs this fall and plant a few. You won't be disappointed and the joy they will bring you in the early spring is priceless.

Happy Spring!

Lisa

Katie's Cookbook—another installment, courtesy of Marge Gordon

Oriental Cole Slaw

Combine in saucepan

1/3 cup oil **1/2 cup sugar**
1/4 cup vinegar **4 tablespoons soy sauce**

Bring to a boil for one minute. Pour over

1 16-oz. package slaw mix
1 bunch green onions, chopped

Marinate mixture in refrigerator for several hours, stirring occasionally.

Before serving, sauté

1 pkg sliced almonds
1 pkg Ramen noodles, crumbled, and package seasoning
2 tablespoons butter

Cool slightly. Drain slaw mixture. Serve with noodle mixture on top. A double batch fills a 9 x 13 pan.

Critter spotting

Muskrat? Groundhog? Something furry, rather small and hanging out near the water is in the backyard. We're betting on the muskrat because of the long tail. It's too far away for us to tell if the tail is triangular, but we're hoping.

But just in case, I suit up the dog (well, put on her leash) and head for the backyard. This critter looks young enough to be intimidated by our 23-pound mutt and I'd like it to think that it will decide that there are other places to be that don't present a bouncing dog to contend with. We don't make it all the way out the back door when the unidentified creature makes a dive for a space behind the neighbor's sea wall. Muskrat for sure. Relief!

Great blue herons are winging overhead. Time to visit one of the local rookeries and see who's hatched. I'm back in some age that ends in "cene" when I see those huge birds flying into the silent rookery and hear it bursting into baby heron cries of "feed ME" regardless of whose parent is incoming with snacks for the proper offspring. West Bloomfield's observation deck has binoculars for hikers to stop for a closeup of the next generation. But they're often in use. It's wiser to bring your own and not have to share the view.

Swans are whistling by as well. They're not calling; it's their wings that make that eerie sound as they pass over the marsh. The marsh is already full of the blackbirds' calls and the folks are cleaning out the feeder on a regular basis. So much easier than having to hunt for food.

Canada geese have staked out their nesting areas after much raucous debate about who gets the choice spots. I can't see any of the nests. They must all have found choice spots this year.

Finches are back at the bird feeder after a winter-long absence. The goldfinches are still in their subdued winter feathers, but we have hopes for the swift return of their brilliant summer array.

Birdwatchers Digest recommends that I put out crushed eggshells for the birds to ingest to replace the calcium that the brooding moms lose in producing shells for their own eggs. I've not seen any birds at the shell pile, but the shells steadily disappear. What other critter might have a calcium deficiency is beyond me.

Our terrier mix is making peace with the two labs next door. All it took was a romp in the dog park where she could run—and keep up—with the big dogs to make her feel important and sure of herself. The labs' owner and I were content to let them race as we shambled along behind them, pleased to have sun to enjoy along the way. It's definitely spring.

--Mar Sclawy © 2008



winter aconite