



Quail's Tales

www.HillandDalegc.org

Hill and Dale is a member of Michigan Garden Clubs and National Garden Clubs

February 2012

President's preface

With the strange weather we've had it seems more like spring, and a part of me is still wondering when the real winter is going to start. It looks like Phil seems to think there will be another six weeks, so maybe there will be some winter after all. I'm quite sure that it won't be too long before some of the early buds ignore the warning and start to produce buds only to get covered by a layer of frozen rain or snow and removing much hope of bountiful blooms. Only time will tell.

February 9 meeting

Well, we were thinking that most of our outdoor vegetation would be under snow in February. And if it wasn't, we weren't likely to be digging in the dirt. So what better time to think about making the most of the yard while there's still time for leisurely planning. Karen Auch will discuss "Low Maintenance Landscaping" at the meeting. Ms. Auch is part of PlantScape Consultants. She is also a certified arborist, certified landscape management specialist, certified nurseryperson and advanced master gardener.

Hospitality will be provided by Jan and David Henry . Given Jan and David's past food endeavors, we can expect to eat well and have the opportunity to admire their presentation.

November 10 meeting minutes

Since we had no formal meeting in December, here are the November minutes that didn't make the December newsletter:

President David Henry called the meeting to order at 8:40.

Treasurer Angela Paul reported on that state of the treasury.

The awards committee chair, Flo Holzknecht, announced that applications for district and state awards from the Michigan Garden Clubs had been sent in.

Amy Langdon stated the November garden therapy project had been a success.

Jeannine Gundle reminded everyone to save oval black plastic microwave trays for the next garden therapy project

We had no unfinished business.

David Henry read a thank you from the Six Rivers Regional Land Conservancy for the speaker's fee from our October meeting.

The Blue Star Memorial Marker was discussed, with the possibility of joining with the other local garden clubs on this project.

Sally inspired us with Christmas greens centerpiece ideas for December's meeting. Remember, spray paint is your friend.

The meeting was adjourned shortly after 9.

Yearbook corrections

We're halfway through the club year. Time to make some yearbook corrections:

Originally scheduled for February, Lisa Steinkopf's presentation "Cultivating Your Green Thumb Indoors!" is now set for the March meeting.

The correct date for Junior Gardeners is February 11.

The next board meeting is February 27.

Spring Plant Gala—May 11,12

Just because winter seems not to have hit yet, don't think that spring is far away. Once again we're scheduled to present our spring plant gala at the same time as Farmington Hills holds its spring plant swap at Heritage Park. Pull out those extra pots, contemplate your barren garden and keep a weather eye out for early perennials to pot up so they'll be looking fine by the gala on May 12.

If you need help with digging and potting, please contact Mar Sclawy early. And if your garden is just not able to donate extras this year, please contact Mar and she'll put you in touch with a gardener who needs help.

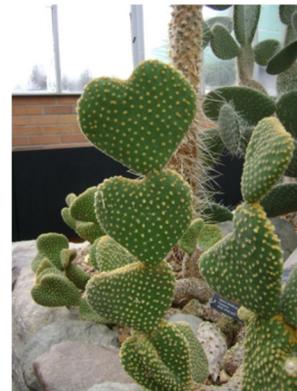
If we collect some swell pots and other gardening accoutrements, we'll plan on a tag sale. As you all know, the gala is our primary fund raiser for all the activities we support during the year and every member is expected to contribute time and effort to its success. In addition to bringing sturdy perennials for the gala, there will be opportunities to identify, tag and display plants on the prep day (Friday) and promote them at the gala on Saturday. Of course you're welcome to help out both days, learn a little and no doubt find a few snacks to help keep up our strength along the way.

Garden therapy

Thanks to Amy and Nancy Adams and Amy Langdon, bagging for Garden Therapy project "Heart to Heart" is complete.

Membership application

After months of promises, Mar Sclawy has finally drafted a new membership application. It follows at the end of the newsletter. Please let her know if you have suggestions for the form and feel free to hand it out to friends who might be considering joining the club.



Horticulture

Valentine Cactus

As I strolled through the cactus/succulent house at Matthei Botanical Garden, I came upon this heart shaped cactus. I love anything heart-shaped, but a heart shaped plant?-I'm in love! This is an Opuntia. They range from Canada to Southern Argentina. I have a hardy one in my yard which blossoms in the summer with big yellow blossoms. Unfortunately, it is not heart shaped. The common name is prickly pear because of its fruit which in most cases is edible. All opuntias have clusters of small, fine, hairy spines(glochids) which look soft but are barbed. Always use gloves when re-potting this plant. The spines are hard to remove, and from my experience, they hurt! Put this plant in a bright window, water it thoroughly and then let it dry out before watering again. It may only need watered once a month in the winter. Keep it on the drier side. If kept wet, like any cactus, it will rot. If you have a chance, go to Matthei this winter, and enjoy a walk through the conservatory. It is beautiful and warm, and the waterfalls add a wonderful sound. It's worth the drive!

Happy Valentine's Day!
Lisa



Critter spotting—Sparrow feeding, endless task

Do sparrows REALLY outnumber all other species of birds by a factor of about 10,000? I'm thinking yes, based on the number of feisty little critters at our bird feeders. I'd carefully planned to attract different kinds of birds by having 1) a feeder with springs that close off the seed portals if a squirrel or really heavy bird lands on a perch, 2) a plain old feeder that any bird with some sort of balance and any squirrel (all of which can master virtually any feeder except that spring-loaded one mentioned above) can access, and 3) a suet feeder, supposedly dedicated to woodpeckers and other long-beaked birds.

What we get is 10,000 (or so) sparrows, climbing over each other, fighting off the downy woodpeckers, intimidating the blue jays, for heaven's sake, and forcing the cardinals to wait for a snack till the rowdy sparrows have had their fill. (Read, maybe later.)

Occasionally an affable chickadee or nuthatch manages to join the throng by virtue of size similarity (I'm guessing). How else could those delightful little black and grey birds manage a place at the feeder among those obnoxious brown sparrows.

In his younger days, our nephew Bob was a big fan of the Redwall series of books in which communities of mice lived complex lives resembling some medieval civilization. Among their most trenchant enemies were the Sparra King and his myriad sparra followers, critters that sounded (and acted) a lot like the sparrows that invade the feeders to this day. No question that the sparrows feasting at our feeders would make a formidable opponent to the best armed and intelligent mouse of days of yore. (Come to think of it, we haven't seen many mice around the place as of late.)

Despite their hordes (or maybe because of them) the sparrows flock to our feeders and then, for no apparent reason fly madly to neighbor Ray's selection of feeders. There is a raptor

that broods over Ray's feeder and one (perhaps the same one) that sits in the juniper near the garden and contemplates feeding frenzy at our feeders. So maybe they're avoiding the raptor and maybe they're just flighty.

Unfortunately, their flight path often takes them over our deck with its glass panels. Their speed often causes them to miss seeing the glass panels until they encounter them bodily. There's often a "clunk." Sometimes they shake off the collision and keep on moving. Sometimes, not. I cleared off the first group of casualties (4) a few weeks ago. Now there are four more inert sparrows on the deck, all toes up. Roxie is enchanted, just waiting for an open door to dash through for a quick, well-aged sparrow snack. The plan is for us to get to 'em before she does. Her plans are dissimilar. We'll see. --Mar Sclawy © 2012



In case you are interested and have the energy and the urge here is some good info

As winter sets in across the country, it is the perfect time to snuggle up with our *Kitchen Garden Seeds catalog* to plan your spring, summer and fall gardens. Make a wish list of the vegetables and herbs that you would like to grow. Think about what you want to harvest for delicious, sultry terrace dinners with family and friends, and bracing feasts to put up or freeze for hearty nourishment on cold winter nights like these. Don't forget about perennial and annual flower seeds to fill your gardens with opulent summer and fall flowers~it is so much less expensive than buying individual plants or flats at the local garden center plus you can select from among the best varieties from around the world.

From a practical perspective, consider your seed order in two parts. The first, most timely part should include the varieties that you must start indoors for transplant into the garden once the threat of frost is over in the spring.

The second part should include varieties that prefer to be direct sown easily into the garden once spring arrives. These are the varieties that magically come to life after you gently nudge them into the warming spring soil with an overwhelming reward of abundant Asian greens, beans, beets, carrots, chard, chicories, collard greens, cucumbers, kale, lettuce, mustard greens, parsnips, peas, pea pods, pumpkins, radishes, rutabagas, salad greens, snap peas, spinach, squash, turnip greens and turnips. And don't forget the magically easy direct-sow flowers, like cosmos, nasturtiums, morning glories, sunflowers and sweet peas, to name just a few.

Here is the general Seed-Starting Schedule for seeds that should be started eight weeks before the last expected spring frost date.

Eight-week General Seed-Starting Timetable

Horticultural Zones 9 & 10: Start seeds indoors in early to mid January.

Horticultural Zone 8: Start seeds indoors in early February.

Horticultural Zone 7: Start seeds indoors in mid February.

Horticultural Zone 6: Start seeds indoors in late February.

Horticultural Zone 5: Start seeds indoors in early March.

Horticultural Zones 1-4: Start seeds indoors in mid to late March.

Here is the Seed-Starting Schedule for vegetables, herbs and flowers that require more or less time prior to transplanting out into the garden.

More-or-Less-Than-Eight Weeks Seed-Starting Timetable

Four Weeks: Melons, Bitter Melon and Cucuzzi Edible Gourds.

Six Weeks: Asparagus, Fennel, Onions, Rhubarb, Shallots, Tomatillos, Basil, Echinacea Root and St. John's Wort.

Eight Weeks: Eggplant, Tomatoes, Chiles, Sweet and Bell Peppers, Chives, Sage, Stevia and Thyme.

Nine Weeks: Broccoli, Cabbage and Kohlrabi (transplant out four weeks before the last frost date).

Ten Weeks: Celery, Celeriac, Jicama and Lemongrass.

Eleven Weeks: Leeks, Artichokes and Cauliflower (transplant out four weeks before the last frost date).

Twelve Weeks: Cardoons and Brussels Sprouts.

Sixteen Weeks: Strawberries (for first year crop) and Rosemary.

Flower Seed-Starting Timetable

Five Weeks: Alyssum.

Six Weeks: Balsam, Cutting Ageratum, China Asters, Celosia, Cleome, Coleus, Catmint Nepeta, Echinacea, Euphorbia, Forget-Me-Nots, Dahlia, Nicotiana, Scabiosa, Snapdragons, Stock and Thunbergia.

Eight Weeks: Baby's Breath, Black-Eyed Susans, Milkweed, Coreopsis, Gaillardia, Globe Amaranth, Helichrysum, Hibiscus, Hollyhock, Heuchera, Nigella, Phlox, Platycodon, Statice and Yarrow.

Ten Weeks: Dianthus, Digitalis, Lobelia and Heliotrope.

Twelve Weeks: Datura, Salvia, Verbena and Viola.

Hill and Dale Garden Club membership information

Name _____

Nickname (if any) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Skills

Plant knowledge

Organizing

Art _____

Crafts _____

Other _____

Interests

Gardening/horticulture

Fundraising

Environment/conservation

Youth

Design/flower arranging

Photography

Publicity/newsletter

Community involvement

Design/flower arranging

Other _____

For more information, call

Bring this form and \$25 membership fee to any Hill and Dale meeting, second Thursday of the month (except January and July) at the Visitor Center at Heritage Park, Farmington Hills.