

North Country Gardeners

UW-EXTENSION COOPERATIVE EXTENSION BURNETT, SAWYER, AND WASHBURN COUNTIES ISSUE 30, MAY 2015



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Greetings, gardeners

It's time to get Ready, Set, Grow! Spring has officially arrived, and we are all looking to get a fresh start on our gardens. While we've been waiting for the soil to warm up and the temperature to climb, it is our hope that the "fresh off the press" 30th edition of the North Country Master Gardener Volunteers Newsletter will inspire you with gardening ideas, tips and events to be noted on your calendar.

However, while our gardens were all bedded down for a long winter's night, the North Country Master Gardeners Volunteers (NCMGV) organization held several planning sessions in preparation for upcoming activities for gardeners of all ages! For area youth, the Mini Master Gardener short course got off to a great start on Saturday, March 28, with many youngsters participating in a "hands-on three-hour session" held at Bashaw Valley Farm & Greenhouse, our project partner. The second session will be held at the Teaching and Display Garden on Saturday, June 6. The full story is on page 2.

The March 31 Seed Saving & Propagation lecture and planting session led by MGV Russ Parker was an evening of preparation for some of your favorite plants to come. The heirloom tomatoes and peppers were seeded to grow into fine specimens, ready just in time for the NCMGV Annual Plant Sale on Saturday, May 16, at the Spooner Ag Research Station (SARS) starting at 8 a.m.

The Teaching and Display Garden (TDG) located on Orchard Road off Hwy. 70 will undergo its usual transformation with the arrival of the All-America Selections annuals for planting in early June. This trial garden is a glistening gemstone in a beautiful farm setting, and a prizewinning one at that. The AAS Landscape Garden Design Contest judges gave us bragging rights (for the second year in a row) by awarding first-place recognition for the "Down on the Farm" theme last year in our category, competing against 14 other gardens nationally! The year before, we won second.

The demonstration garden will be waiting for your visit all summer long! Please stop by to see what's growing ... and maybe what's not ... as this is an "experimental laboratory" each year. There are benches to sit on and enjoy the ambiance or dream about gardens. While Tuesday, August 18, may seem futuristic, mark your calendars now for the 17th annual Twilight Garden Tour starting at 4 p.m. With live music by the Second Wind String Band, great speakers, wagon tours of the research station, displays, and tasting tables, it's an inspiring event for the whole family!

We hope you enjoy our efforts to promote gardening and upcoming events sponsored by UW-Extension. Your comments about this newsletter are appreciated via email and phone calls, along with gardening concerns or questions. Most of all, we look forward to meeting you at the Teaching and Display Garden which is open from sun up to sunset this summer!

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Mini Master Gardener Short Course draws children into wondrous world of gardening

UW-Extension's North Country Master Gardener Association is hosting their popular Mini Master Gardener Short Course for youth and their families. Twenty-four youths and 16 adults participated in the first mini session held on Saturday March 28 at Bashaw Valley Farm and Greenhouse and was a huge success.

In part one of the series participants explored the secrets of soil, incredible edibles, seeds, sprouts and shoots; practical paper pots; and terrific tomato transplants. Refreshments and tours of Bashaw Valley Greenhouses and fruit orchards were also included.

The second mini session will be on Saturday June 6 from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. at the Spooner Agriculture Research Station Teaching and Display Garden.

Part two of the series will dig a little deeper into gardening, exploring hot and healthy composting, whipping weeds, waste free watering, going vertical with pole beans and cucumbers, and small space gardens. Refreshments and tours of the display garden and dairy sheep research facilities are also included.

All registered participants from the first session are invited to attend



the second session on June 6. There are still openings for more youth, so if you know a budding young gardener let them know.

All youth age 5 and up are welcome to attend. Cost to participate in the June 6 session is \$5 per youth, or \$10 for two or more youth participant. Adults 18 and older are free, however they must be accompanied by a paid youth. This event is sponsored by UW-Extension's North Country Master Gardener Volunteer

Association, Bashaw Valley Farm and Greenhouse, and the Spooner Ag Research Station.

More information

For more information or to pre-register, contact Kevin Schoessow, area agriculture development agent for Burnett, Washburn and Sawyer counties, or Lorraine Toman, at 1-800-528-1914 or 715-635-3506. Space is limited.

Registration deadline is June 1.



Want to grow better vegetables?

Here are some tips for an abundant harvest

- Plant sweet corn and beans every two weeks through June for an extended harvest.

- Tomato cages are an inexpensive way to support your long-stemmed perennials.

- To store seed packets, place them in a small file box labeled with the date they are to be planted. After planting and labeling the plants with variety and date planted, return the empty packets to the file for future reference.

- If you plan to can, plant determinate tomatoes so the fruit will ripen all at once. If you prefer your tomatoes fresh from the vine, plant indeterminate tomatoes so the ripening will be staggered.

- When it is time to plant lettuce (early spring, about one month before last frost), the climate is also appropriate to plant chives, mint, oregano, parsley, sage, sweet marjoram, tarragon, and thyme.

- To control weeds in a garden: prevent weed seed germination, destroy weeds that sprout before they bear seed, and do not use mulches or compost contaminated with weed seeds.

- Newly transplanted plants should be protected from cutworms with collars. Cut strips of cardboard 2 inches wide by 8 inches long and staple them into a band which is placed around the plants. Press the collar about 1 inch into the soil.

- Chickweed is full of nutrients and has a nutty flavor when eaten raw. You also can eat it steamed with butter or other flavorings.

- Keep beans and peas well watered to ensure maximum nitrogen fixation. Even mild, water stress can significantly reduce nitrogen fixation. Weight and number of nitrogen-fixing root nodules decrease as water stress increases, and nitrogen



Overnight, cutworms can destroy a row of seedlings pretty quickly. Wrapping vulnerable stems in paper before planting may prevent the cutworm from dining on them.

fixation ceases completely during extended dry periods.

- Another garden use for plastic milk jugs -- seep irrigation. Simply use a large nail to punch holes in the sides of a jug, spacing them about 2 inches apart. Bury the jug, leaving the neck protruding from the soil. Fill the jug with water (solutions of liquid fertilizer may be used to water and fertilize at the same time) and screw the cap on firmly. The water will gradually seep out, providing a slow, deep irrigation for surrounding plants.

- When crops like squash or cucumbers are planted in a circle or hill, place a stick upright in the middle of the circle and leave it there. Later on, you'll know where to water the main roots hidden among the vines.

- Allow more space for pumpkins than for cucumbers or melons. When the desired number of fruit have set, the end of the vine can be pinched off to prevent additional fruit production and encourage large fruit size. Harvest when rind is hard enough so it can't be penetrated with a fingernail.

- To ensure pollination of sweet corn, plant several rows together in a block, rather than in one long row. Side-dress with 3 Tbsp. of 10-10-10 per 10 feet of row when 12 to 18 inches high. Keep well watered, especially from tasseling time to picking. Hill corn plants by pushing a few inches of soil up around the base of the plants when they are fertilized. This provides stability, but take care not to disturb the roots or remove suckers.

Climate changes are affecting region

By Sue Reinardy

In the UW-Madison online course titled *Changing Weather and Climate in the Great Lakes Region* Professor Steve Ackerman showed statistics that may be of interest to gardeners in the Great Lake region. The list below is just some of the trends that you may want to think about as you plan your gardens.

The Upper Great Lakes region has experienced an increase on average of about nine additional days in the growing season (the days between the first and last frost) over the last 50 years. This could mean that we can grow additional and different varieties of plants. It also means that certain invasive species, insects, and diseases may gain a foothold in our area that we have not experienced before.

Precipitation levels over the last century have increased 5 to 10 percent especially in northern Wisconsin and northern Minnesota. And we receive that precipitation increasingly in fewer heavy events. At least 40 percent of our precipitation falls in 10 or fewer events. We can make these events less damaging by installing rain gardens that help ab-

sorb the excess moisture and installing rain barrels that store the water to be used later.

While our overall precipitation levels have increased; spring rains in northern Wisconsin are trending dryer. This means that we may need to think about irrigation or alternative crops and plants that can tolerate dry spells.

Our summer days of extreme heat (defined as over 90 degrees) has a very slight downward trend in the Upper Great Lakes region; however the number of nights with the minimum temperature above 70 degrees is trending higher. This could help us grow plants that like the heat (think peppers and eggplants).

While our springs are getting dryer, our falls are getting warmer and wetter. Comparing weather data between the 30-year periods of 1951-80 and 1981-2010 the mean temperature has increased by 1 degree, and precipitation has increased by 10 to 30 percent in the Upper Great Lakes.

The Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change (WICC) website has for more information on climate change specific to our state at:

www.wicci.wisc.edu The WICC is a network of many groups and individuals (UW and Wisconsin State agency scientists), who work together to look for ways Wisconsin can mitigate climate change and how we can adapt to those changes.

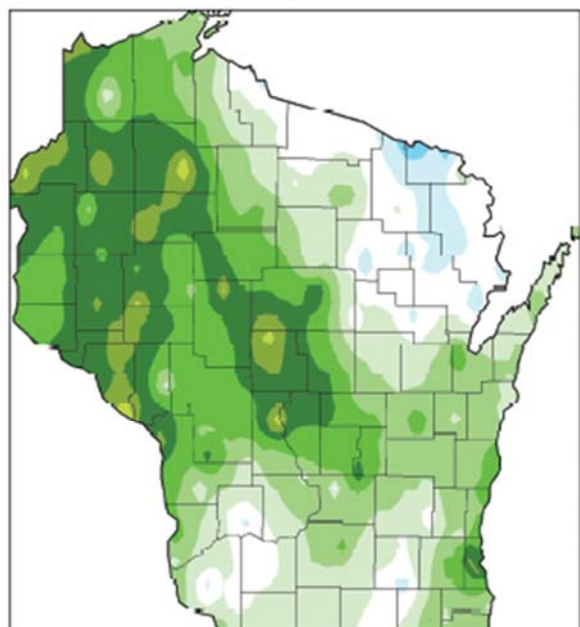
This is how the WICC summarizes Wisconsin's climate changes:

Wisconsin's climate has changed since 1950. The average temperature for the whole state has risen by roughly 1.0–1.5 deg. F. The rise has been uneven: northwestern parts of Wisconsin have warmed by roughly 2.0 deg. F; southern and northeastern parts have not warmed much, if at all. Temperature changes also differ by season. Winter and spring have warmed more than summer and fall. Nighttime low temperatures have risen more than have daytime highs.

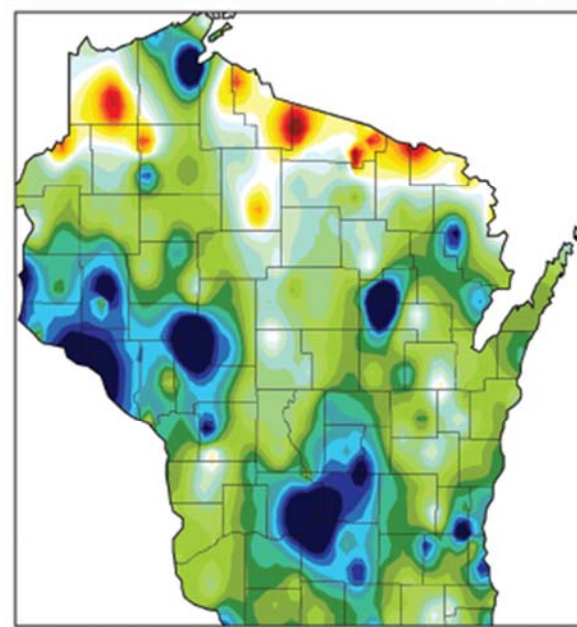
These changes are reflected in Wisconsin's growing seasons. Since 1950, the growing season has become between one and four weeks longer in different parts of Wisconsin. North central and far northwestern regions

SEE CLIMATE CHANGE, PAGE 5

Change in Annual Average Temperature (°F) from 1950 to 2006



Change in Annual Average Precipitation (inches) from 1950 to 2006



Tomatoes, peppers highlight plant sale

Tomatoes are one of summer's great delights, especially the sun-ripened, fresh-from-the-vine tomatoes so full of flavor they almost make a person swoon.

The UW-Extension North County Master Gardeners Association (NCMGA) will help area gardeners grow on Saturday, May 16, at its 13th annual plant sale. Specially chosen heirloom tomato plants and a variety of peppers will be featured at the 13th annual sale.

Heirloom tomatoes were the cornerstone of the group's first plant sale, and since then NCMGA has increased the number of heirloom choices and added a few of their fa-

vorite hybrid varieties. The tomato and pepper plants are started from seed and grown by volunteers specifically for the sale.

Though hundreds of the plants will be at the sale, they tend to sell out quickly, and gardeners are advised to go early for the best selection. The sale begins at 8 a.m. at the Spooner Ag Research Station and runs until the plants are sold out.

The proceeds go toward supporting the Demonstration Garden that is open to the public on Orchard Lane, just east of the ag station; for garden-related grants; for promoting horticulture in Sawyer, Washburn, and

Burnett counties; and other horticultural projects.

Master Gardener volunteers come together from many backgrounds. They find common ground in their appreciation for growing plants, whether edible or ornamental. They are trained volunteers who assist the University of Wisconsin-Extension staff by helping people in the community better understand horticulture and the environment, and they donate thousands of hours worth of their time each year toward that end.

Further information can be found at <http://wimastergardener.org/?q=NorthCountry>.

Climate change

FROM PAGE 4

have seen the greatest growing season increases. Winter has become correspondingly shorter. Lakes freeze later and thaw earlier on average now than they did in the past.

These changes are reflected in plant and animal communities. Spring birds arrive earlier today than in the past. Spring plants bloom earlier. Gardeners are seeing shifts in plant hardiness zones.

We still have weather in Wisconsin, of course. Temperature, precipitation, and storms vary noticeably from year-to-year and day-to-day. WICCI does not predict the weather. But participants in WICCI are working hard to understand how climate has already changed and how it may change in the future.

By sharing this specific data-driven information we can help limit vulnerability to climate change in Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest.

Tips

FROM PAGE 3

- When thinning beans, watch for "snake heads." seedlings that have lost one or both of their cotyledons and produce poor weak sprouts, and 'bald heads', seedlings that have the growth point damaged so severely that they can't develop. Both types of seedlings will be weak and delayed in growth and should be removed.
- Trellis and stake downwind from the prevailing winds so plants will lean against the supports when the wind is blowing.
- Frequent picking of cucumber, summer squash, bean, pea, lettuce, and greens while they are small and tender will improve the quality of the produce and increase the yield of each plant.
- After planting seed from this year's packets, store leftovers in a tightly sealed jar in the refrigerator. Add a desiccant such as a layer of tissues in which 2 tablespoons of powdered milk have been wrapped to absorb excess moisture from the air.

Don't prune any oak trees now or risk disease

STOP! We're now in the time period in which you should not prune or wound oaks because of oak wilt. Oak wilt has been confirmed in many NW Wisconsin counties. Oak wilt fungus will begin fruiting soon under the bark of trees that were infected and killed last year. The sticky sweet fungal mat attracts beetles which can transport the spores of the fungus to other trees. If you prune or wound a tree you may be attracting beetles to that fresh wound. If those beetles have recently been feeding on an oak wilt fungal mat they can bring oak wilt spores to your trees. For more information, search online for "Oak Wilt WI DNR."

Nothing tastes more like spring than rhubarb pie!

By KD Childs

A harbinger of spring is often found in the rhubarb patch where eager sprouts begin to shoot up through the chilly soil, no matter how harsh the winter or deep the frost.

Rhubarb has been growing with gusto and tenacity on our planet for thousands of years. It originated in the cool highlands of China growing along the Volga River as well as in Tibet and Mongolia. This rhizome, which dates back to 2700 B.C., was first treasured for its medicinal properties. The roots were used to cure fever during the plague and heal the emperor's wounded soldiers. It is said the roots are still being used in China for pharmaceutical and cosmetic purposes.

The large red-veined umbrella-like leaves have a high concentration of the poisonous oxalic acid and must be discarded. But, it is in the lovely petiole or stalk that we find culinary pleasure.

While rhubarb eventually found its way to Europe, it didn't arrive in the United States until 1772 when Ben Franklin was said to have tasted it in England and had some roots sent to his pal, John Bartram in Philadelphia. As they say, the rest is history. By the mid 1800s rhubarb was growing nicely in gardens as well as the countryside along old farm buildings and was being sold at produce markets.

First, rhubarb is a vegetable masquerading as a fruit. While known for its tartness, nutritionally it is rich in vitamin C, calcium, and dietary fiber. As a very hardy perennial, grown widely throughout the United States and Canada, it is the plant that keeps on giving and asks very little in return.

The planting, care, and harvesting steps are simple. First locate a sunny well-drained site and work some well-rotted manure into the soil (or a quarter cup of 10-10-10 may be substituted). Next nestle a large vigorous root and bud combo approximate-

ly 3 inches below soil. Additional hills may be planted about 3 feet apart.

Rhubarb needs good air circulation, and an ample straw mat around the crowns will help keep them cool, moist, and weed-free during the growing season. A leaf cover makes for a nice winter blanket.

In four to five years, the hill may need to be divided to maintain the slim stalk size and desired production. This is easily done by driving a spade through the middle of the plant in early spring and whereby expanding your patch by replanting the root/bud components. . . or by sharing with a friend.

Also with the right conditions, rhubarb may be harvested well into summer and the plants will survive for decades. Growing from seed is not recommended. Seedlings can be detected by carrot-shaped roots, and they are said to "not come true" as they may revert back to a "scruffy ancestor" lacking flavor.



However, delayed gratification must be applied when it comes to harvesting. Do not harvest any the first-year or more than 10 percent the second. The third year it's time for rhubarb pie!

To harvest, snap the stalk off at the base and then remove and toss the leaves on-site or on the compost pile to decompose. After three years, the more you pick the better and earlier in the season, too, for maximum color, tenderness, and flavor.

Be sure to cut seed stalks at the base as soon as they appear to preserve manufactured food for new stalks.

In the 1990s a Michigan State University horticulturist specialized in hybridizing rhubarb with over 50 known varieties. Far more popular than the green varieties in the past, recommendations include cherry-red stalk field grown varieties such as Canada Red, Valentine, Ruby, Crimson Wine, and Cherry Red.

When preparing rhubarb for immediate use, trim the stalks, wash, dry, and store in fridge crisper for a few days. Cleaned rhubarb, cut into 1-inch pieces, may be frozen in a proper container for up to a year.

Perhaps you either love it or it's not your favorite . . . but if you are so inclined to try something new, here's a recipe for Rhubarb Salsa which is great served with a savory dish.

Rhubarb Salsa

2 cups finely diced rhubarb
 1/2 cup chopped sweet red pepper
 1/2 cup fresh cilantro
 1/2 cup chopped yellow pepper
 3 chopped green onions.
 1 small chili pepper, minced and seeded
 1 - 2 tbsp. brown sugar to taste
 salt and pepper to taste

Blanch rhubarb in a saucepan in boiling water for 10 to 20 seconds. Strain under cold water, drain. Place in a glass bowl. Add remaining ingredients, mix well. Store in refrigerator for up to a week.

'Meet Me in the Garden'

By Sue Reinardy

You are invited to join Master Gardener Volunteers at the Spooner Agriculture Research Station's Teaching and Display Garden for three informational programs this summer. Master Gardener Volunteers will make presentations and can answer your questions at these sessions.

Peak Performance Seminar Tuesday, June 16, 6 p.m.

This session will focus on tips and techniques to time the peak performance of your garden when you can enjoy it the most. Presentations will be on selecting and cultivating plants that meet your specifications for time of day, the season or filling the lull in your garden. Plant lists will include early, mid, and late blooms.

There will be tips on extending the season, ideas on how to solve common timing problems, and how to add plants that will help your garden have interest during each season.

Pretty Pots Seminar Tuesday, July 14, 6 p.m.

Master Gardener Volunteers will share their experiences putting to-

gether interesting and long lasting containers. Learn how to combine different plants, ideas on different containers, starting with the right soil, fertilizer and watering tips, and new trends in container gardening.

Plenty to Pick Seminar Saturday, September 12, 10 a.m. to noon

The Garden will be at its harvest peak, and there will be plenty to see and learn on what has gone well, not so well, and why. This session will focus on when and how to harvest and store both vegetables and flowers. Tips will be included on putting the garden to bed for the season.

The demonstration garden can be found across from the Sheep Research Facility on Orchard Lane. Orchard Lane is located 1 1/2 miles east of Spooner on Highway 70 or 1/2 mile west of the Hwy 70/53 interchange.

Rain or shine – please dress accordingly.

Sessions will be cancelled if there is severe weather.

These programs are free, and no registration is required.

2015 Container Challenge *Everyone is invited to participate*



As part of the "Meet Me in the Garden" seminar series, the public is invited to participate in the Container Challenge. You are invited to participate on Tuesday, July 14 at 6 p.m. at the Spooner Agriculture Research Station's Teaching and Display Garden by entering your container in this challenge. Prizes and bragging rights will be awarded in several categories, and all containers will be critiqued as part of the seminar series.

Just bring your containers with you and you can enter as many categories as you wish.

The categories are:

- Best use of vegetables in a container.
- Best use of perennials in a container.
- Best use of art or structure in a container.
- Best use of the "filler, spiller, thriller" concept.
- Best use of a single color or plant in a container.

Along with seeing the creative containers entered in the contest you will learn more about container gardening.

So start your containers now and plan on coming to the gardens on July 14!

WORKSFORUS

Tips from Carol Alcoe

Here's a tip I learned in a recent trip to Costa Rica. It's not related to Zone 3/4 gardening but helpful when choosing a pineapple.

Forget the usual things you may have heard - sniffing, squeezing, tugging on the leaves, looking for a nice yellow color. The yellow color is artificially created with exposure to a certain gas, so forget that. Pineapples are all picked "green" but are actually ripe. Look for big 'eyes' and fruit that feels heavy for its size. Local markets are currently featuring green pineapples from Costa Rica. Enjoy!

Visit us on the Web! This newsletter and other useful information are online at:

<http://spooner.ars.wisc.edu>

<http://wimastergardener.org/?q=NorthCountry>

<https://www.facebook.com/spoonerag>



EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

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