

# North Country Gardeners

UW-EXTENSION COOPERATIVE EXTENSION BURNETT, SAWYER, AND WASHBURN COUNTIES ISSUE 24, MAY 2012



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"Works for Us"

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## Greetings

We hope you enjoy the latest edition of our semi-annual North Country Gardeners Newsletter. While we do most of our communicating via email and Facebook, we still feel it worth the effort and expense to send a hard-copy newsletter out to our list of dedicated gardeners. This newsletter is a joint effort by the Spooner Area Ag Agents office and UW-Extension Master Gardener Volunteers. We hope you enjoy receiving this and learn something new about gardening.

Keep an eye out for the "Works for Us" tips that you'll see throughout the newsletter. They are the voice of real-life experience speaking. Send us your favorite tips, too, for the August newsletter. Maybe we'll have enough for a full page ...

Our spring weather has been the most unusual in recent memory. Frost has already affected some early growth on lilies, hostas, and other herbaceous plants. Some early-blooming fruit trees have frost injury to blossoms, and we still have over three weeks of likely frost. As they say, "You can't do anything about the weather." We will have to wait and see what Mother Nature has in store for us.

There is so much growing on this time of year. The North Country Master Gardener Association is gearing up for its annual plant sale on May 19. School garden projects are flourishing, community gardens are going in, and a general increased interest in gardening and growing your own food is strengthening. It's a great time to be a gardener.

We would like to thank all the Master Gardener Volunteers who contributed to this newsletter and who volunteer towards dozens of community projects all across northwestern Wisconsin. Your time and talents are greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions about any of the upcoming workshops or volunteer opportunities, please give us or any of the North Country Master Gardener Association committee members a call or email. As always we thank you for your continued interest and support of UW-Extension and the UW-Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program.

Happy gardening.

Kevin Schoessow  
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Mary Burnham  
President  
North Country Master Gardeners Association

## Master Gardener Volunteers' work recognized

Each year North Country Master Gardener Association recognizes individuals for their efforts. This past year the following MGVs were recognized for their generous cumulative hours of volunteer time:

- Nancy Axelson (Frederic), Barbara Boatman (Shell Lake), and Teri Strand (Sarona) for 150 hours of total cumulative volunteer time
- Deb Studley (Webster) and Mary Burnham (Spooner) for 250 hours.

- Kristie Henning (Grantsburg) for 500 hours.
- Michelle La Barbera (Winter) for 750 hours.
- Sharon Tarras (Spooner) for 1,000 hours.

# Houseplant watering systems: Which deliver?

By Sue Reinardy

There are many systems for indoors that claim to do a great job delivering moisture for houseplants. But as gardeners we know that each plant has its own finicky needs, and the challenge even for hand watering is how to provide just the right amount. This past winter I tested several systems prior to going on a two-week trip. While my neighbor has proven to be even more reliable than I, it was time to find an alternative way to take care of the plants.

My goal was to find a system that worked, was inexpensive, and did not require a hook-up to our water system or electricity.

I first tried those ubiquitous watering globes you can find in almost any hardware store. The package claimed to deliver the perfect amount of water as the plants needed it. Even the largest globes were hard to fill at the water faucet and to get to the plant. After a day, no matter what moisture level, they were emptied. These look nice, so I



now use them as decoration in my houseplant pots (sans water.)

My next experiment was with a wick – basically a cotton rope. The wick is soaked in water, then one end goes into the plant pot, the other into a container of water. As the soil and wick dry, the wick pulls in moisture from the container. This method worked well although it was not reliable each and every time. There is also no way to regulate exactly how much water is delivered; all plants got the same amount.

Finally I happened upon a system that used the same wicking principle. This one had a ceramic cone that

is filled with water and a small tube with a ceramic end that is placed in the water container. The container can be moved above or below to deliver just the right amount of water for that plant. I found these to be so much more reliable than even my hand watering. I watered my houseplants by this method all winter long and left them for two weeks without any problems.

There are a number of types and sources for these types of watering systems. Here is what I used for my experiment:

Globes – can be found in most hardware stores.

Wick – used Water Worm™ from Polymath Company, <http://waterworm.hostwebs.com>.

Ceramic cone – used Automatic Plant Waterers from Lee Valley, <http://www.leevalley.com/US/garden/page.aspx?p=45295&cat=2,2280,54307&ap=2>.

Here's hoping you find that perfect system for your plants the next time you need to leave them.

## Newsletters, wealth of info awaits discovery online

A treasure-trove of information is online at both the Spooner Ag Station and NCMGA websites (see below).

All of the newsletters are archived, along with a nifty search bar that lets you find past articles, say, on potting soil mixtures or fighting disease and pests.

Several factsheets are there, including ones on poison ivy, manufactured vs. natural fertilizers, techniques for growing fruits, selected annuals and vegetables for the North, and tips for growing grapes.

You can also find copies of the demo garden's perennial garden guide book and 2011 fruit, flower, and vegetable guide book.

### On Facebook

Want to get the latest on the events and activities at the Spooner Ag Research Station? Get connected by going to our Facebook page. It's easy to connect by starting at the home Web page for the Station at <http://ars.wisc.edu/spooner/>.

At the bottom of the page you'll find a section with the link to the

Station's Facebook page; just click on the blue "Spooner Agricultural Research Station" link and sign up.

You will find information on coming events, pictures of what's growing, and connections to gardening and agricultural news. Some recent postings include a notice of the upcoming Master Gardeners plant sale, information on how children can sign up for Mini Master Gardeners, and pictures from the latest grape pruning workshop.

Become a friend now.

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

<http://www.cals.wisc.edu/ars/spooner>  
<http://wimastergardener.org/?q=NorthCountry>  
<https://www.facebook.com/spoonerag>

# Save time, money with native plants

At the Hunt Hill's "Gardening for Nature" program on May 19, from 1 to 3 p.m. (after the plant sale), we will show you how you can improve your property and reduce maintenance by making the right changes to your landscape. We will talk about the value of native plant gardens to birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. These gardens are not only valuable in rural settings or at the lake. In an urban setting, even a small native plant garden can provide an important haven for migrating birds and butterflies.

We will begin with the basics of garden design. Next we will discuss

specifics on the use of native plants in gardens: choosing the right plants for your site, organizing them, preparing the site, and finally caring for your plants once they are in place. Replacing part of your lawn with a native plant garden will reduce the need for constant mowing and fertilization. You can save time and money.

We will tour the Hunt Hill rain gardens. These gardens have an important purpose to control water runoff. Rain gardens can be beautiful as well as functional, and you'll see what established rain gardens look like and how they work.

The trend for native landscaping isn't new, but there is a growing awareness of our environment and our collective impact on it. Using native plants in our landscapes can give us a sense of connection with nature. It is a small way we can improve things in our own backyards.

## Registration, information

Registration and payment must be received by Friday, May 18. The cost is \$6, and payment can be made at <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/producer/21708>.

Call 715-635-6543 or email [info@hunthill.org](mailto:info@hunthill.org) for more info.

## Carrot growing made easier

By Sherri Roman

I remember my first experience with putting in carrot seeds in our family garden plot. I carefully dropped them in a long row and afterwards, brushed the soil back over the top to cover them. Though it was great to get carrots, it seemed to take forever to get them in! Each year I planted a garden, I loathed having to put in the carrot seeds – until last year.

Whether it was out of sheer genius or plain laziness, I came up with a new plan

...

There I was standing over the garden bed. In my hand was a packet of Denver Carrot seeds. Looking down, I heaved a sigh of despair, nearly giving up and thought, "I'll just broadcast these babies and see what happens." So, I began by scraping aside about one inch of top soil. I opened up the seed

packet, dumped them into the palm of my hand, and with a pinch at a time, began sprinkling them all over the bed until they were gone. I proceeded to cover the entire bed with the dirt I scraped aside and patted it down with my hands until I was satisfied with the results.

I stood back and admired my handiwork with a smile. I felt so smart, though I did

wonder what would become of my little experiment.

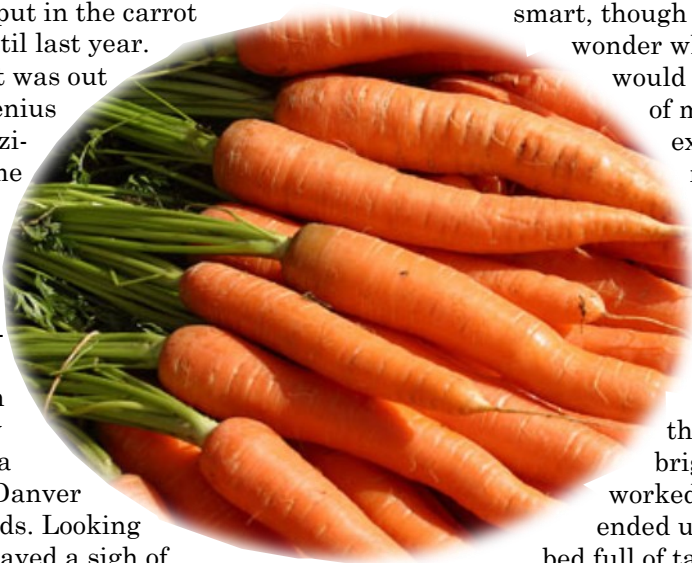
Well, at harvest time, I was delighted

to see that my bright idea worked and ended up with a

bed full of tasty baby

carrots to can!

I was so proud of having come up with a new way of planting my carrot seeds, and it only took only half the time!



## WORKSFORUS

Tips from Sue Reinardy

Cucumbers are a trailing vine, and the usual instructions are to plant the seeds in hills or mounded rows about three feet apart to give them plenty of room to sprawl on the ground. I have found that training them to grow on a trellis or fence conserves space in my small garden.

The advantages of going vertical are many in addition to a smaller space. They seem to be less susceptible to problems such as powdery mildew, bacterial wilt, and leaf spot. The fruit hangs so they are almost always picture perfect, and getting them off the ground makes them far easier to see and pick.

Squash can also be grown vertically but may need extra support to hold the fruit (like a nylon stocking.)

I also allow my gourds and pumpkins to climb nearby evergreens and shrubs, and neither seem to have any adverse effects.

# Winter savory deserves more recognition

By Kathryn Schiedermayer

I have been growing savory (*Satureja montana*) for over 15 years, and yet when family and friends walk my garden paths, no one seems to recognize it. However, after touching the lush green mounds of savory and tasting its peppery leaves, they all vow to have savory in their gardens next season.

**Description:** Hardy evergreen with woody upright stems, dark green glossy leaves, and small white flowers. There is also an annual summer savory (*Satureja hortensis*).

**Height:** 12 inches.

**Spacing:** Plant 8 to 10 inches apart.

**Soil:** Light, well-drained.

**Propagation:** Savory can be grown from seeds but will take at least 20 days to germinate. Savory can also be grown by layering, division or cuttings. Folk lore says sa-

vory does best when seeds are planted during the moon's first-quarter phase. Or look for savory at your local nursery.

**Planting Location:** Full sun. Savory is an excellent choice for rock gardens and containers. It's a favorite of honeybees, so locate plants near hives if possible.

**Maintenance:** Prune often to prevent woody growth and to keep bushy.

**Harvesting:** Harvest leaves just as flower buds are formed. Harvesting can start once plant is at least six inches in height.

**Preserving:** Savory dries and stores very well. It can be dried in an electric dehydrator or on racks made of screen or board laths.

**History/Mythology:** Savory is one of the oldest flavoring herbs recorded. Charlemagne had savory as one of the 78 tasty herbs grown in

his royal gardens in the year 812. The Romans introduced savory into Britain where it became a valued disinfectant strewing herb.

**Culinary:** Savory has a very peppery flavor and is known as the "bean herb" and should always be paired with beans, fresh or dried. In Germany it is called *hohnenkraut* or *herb bean*. Savory is an excellent choice to add to most vegetables and is a great addition to soups, particularly cream-based ones. Dried savory is excellent to mix with breadcrumbs for coating fish or meats. Savory is part of the "herbes de Provence" herb mixture.

Fresh savory when chewed will help freshen the breath and mouth and will aid in digestion of foods.

**Household:** Add crushed dried savory to household cleaning solutions for help with inhibiting growth of bacteria and fungi.

**Companion plant:** Said to grow well with beans, onions, thyme, and oregano.

# Cat, and daughter, introduced to fresh catnip

By Sherri Roman

My 19-year-old daughter, Sarah, L-

## WORKSFORUS

Tips from Bonnie Hoffer

My all-time favorite radish is Rainbow Radishes from Jung Seeds. They don't get wormy, ever. Two more seed favorites – Northern Lights swiss chard and purple string beans. The purple beans are beautiful growing in the garden. Pretty plant, pretty blossom, pretty beans, which turn green when cooked! They also seem to be a little firmer for canning. Multi-colored Northern Lights is so pretty too, with red, purple, yellow, green stems.

O-V-E-S her cat, Milo. And Milo L-O-V-E-S Sarah back. Milo, or Lumpkin, as he is so affectionately called, became a member of our family nearly seven years ago. He is spoiled and acts like he is royalty. On top of that, he expects everyone in the family to treat him as such.

Well, Sarah loves to lavish Milo with little gifts now and then. She gets him things like new clothes, fancy cat foods that come in a small can with its own pull-tab top, and dried catnip.

Catnip! I thought, "Why does she buy that dried stuff when she can grow it fresh?"

Therefore, along with my own experimentation with herbs last year, I asked Sarah what she thought about growing a pot full of the cat-

intoxicating greens. She thought it was a great idea!

So we got a 12-inch pot, filled it with good soil, and sprinkled in a packet full of catnip herb seeds. After giving it a good watering, we put it under a grow light. As it grew and matured, we naturally set it outdoors on our picnic table in the front yard where Milo likes to hang out.

When Sarah introduced the fresh catnip to Milo, he enjoyed chewing on the small leaves at his own leisure.

I reminded Sarah that since it was going to be outdoors, it needed to be watered more often.

Now as Milo nibbles on catnip, we can enjoy watching him indulge in the feline-loving herb all summer long!



# School gardens, students, thriving together

## Students learn varied topics at Spooner garden

March and April have kept us busy starting our tomato and pepper seeds with both the third- and fifth-grade kids at the gardens at Spooner Area School District. The week of April 23-27 we had a “Be Green Week” celebration (a combination Earth Day/Arbor Day/Global Youth Day) at the elementary school. We started the week out with a fruit and veggie (or harvest) presentation by Beth Emmerson, a local producer of maple syrup, and the kids got to sample some homemade maple granola after they learned all about the process of collecting sap.

We highlighted the morning announcements with green-living tips and some interesting tree tidbits and then finished off the week with outside activities for the entire school. Those activities included getting the

garden prepped and cleaned up, transplanting peppers, planting flower beds, vermicomposting, marigold planting with the Spooner Garden Club, composting and recycling info/games, and an Arbor Day proclamation and tree planting ceremony.

The fourth-grade students and teachers really shined by taking on and leading 10-minute sessions of poetry, song, and play for all of the other students and really did a phenomenal job with the ceremony itself. Thanks to the Kid Concoctions middle school after-school club facili-



**Students at Spooner Elementary School learn about vermicomposting.**

tated by Amy Young, we were also able to add four Leopold benches (two at each) to our school garden enhancements this year.

We are also extremely grateful to MGVS Russ Parker for getting our cold frame back up and running and hope to utilize it soon!

## Northwood: Savoring fresh



A change of location to a more spacious spot than originally planned for the garden at Northwood School has prompted a larger vision and a larger garden. Circular and rectangular raised beds form a dynamic layout, and fruit trees have been added to the “local flavor” mix.

Fellow gardeners are encouraged to help with the gardens over the summer. If interested, please call 715-466-2297 for information.



## WORKSFORUS

Tips from Hythe Mann

Belinda Jensen, Kare11 Saturday morning show, years ago, said wouldn't it be nice if every American had a little bit of red, white, and blue in their garden, if

not every day, at least for 4th of July. Maybe perennials grouped together – white shasta daisy, pink/red astilbe, and purple/blue thistle. It was a nice grouping at my old house.

Heard on garden talk show one Friday morning (Melinda from UW-Extension, I was driving and did-

n't get all the info): Sometimes you try so hard to do all the right things, and the plants don't thrive. Sometimes you toss a plant in a sand box, and it loves it and is so healthy.

I think that is Mother Nature's way of proving who is in charge.

# Tours, garden walks, classes planned

By Kevin Schoessow

The Spooner Ag Research Station has a beautiful teaching and display garden located on Orchard Lane across from the Sheep Research Facilities. This one-acre garden is a joint effort between the Spooner Station, UW-Extension, and Master Gardener Volunteers.

It encompasses landscaped displays of perennial flowers and shrubs; an All-America Selections display garden; plantings of small fruits, apples, and plums; trellised rows of table and wine grapes; herbs and vegetables, including heirlooms; and a unique off-the-grid windmill and drip irrigation system.

Below is a tentative list of events planned in the garden.

- *Tuesday Night Garden Walk Series* – 6 until 8 p.m. on June 19, July 17, and September 18.

These are informal discussions out in the garden that will include a brief stroll through the gardens. Discussions will be led by area Master Gardener Volunteers and will highlight seasonal topics.

- *Annual Twilight Garden Tour* – 4 p.m. until dusk, August 21

This is our annual garden open house. The event features guest speakers, vendors, displays, vegetable tastings, and a festive evening out in the garden.

- *Alzheimer's Garden Walk Fund Raiser* Saturday, July 14

We are happy to be one of several featured gardens for this fundraising event.

- *Mini Master Gardener Short Course: Part 2* – Saturday, June 2

A hands-on workshop for youths and their invited adult guests. Pre-registration is required

## Tours

The garden is open to the public for self-guided tours. Group-guided tours are available by appointment by contacting the Spooner Area Ag Agents Office, 1-800-528-1914 or 715-635-3506.

# State MG conference to be held in North

By Tony Webber

The annual Wisconsin Master Gardener Association Conference will be held in Ashland this year, the first time it has been this far north. Dates are September 14 and 15 with the possibility of an Apostle Island tour on the 16th. There will be a bus tour of Bayfield area orchards, perennial

growers, etc., on Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., leaving from the Ashland High School (also the conference site). Registration is 5 to 7 p.m. There will be a Friday keynote speaker at 7:30 p.m. (Melinda Myers) followed by a book signing and social hour (no alcohol allowed on school grounds).

Twelve breakout sessions will be held Saturday along with another keynote (not confirmed yet but looks like it will be Tia Nelson, daughter of Gaylord Nelson).

Look for registration material in the next WIMGA newsletter or online. Hope to see you all there.

## WORKSFORUS

Tips from Sharon Tarras

My favorite tools are a Felco 9 pruner and a sharp shovel. The pruner is old and worn and like an extension of my hand. The shovel is a close second.

Favorite garden gloves are Atlas Nitrile Touch – they protect my hands and allow me the dexterity I need, even when transplanting tiny seedlings.

Bogs makes waterproof rubber gardening shoes that have arch support and keep my feet dry. They get a little warm in summer but are perfect for cooler weather.

# MGV plant sale set for May 19

By Sharon Tarras

This year – at the 10th anniversary of our plant sale – we are featuring perennials to attract birds and butterflies to your garden. These hardy plants provide a long season of color and interest, and they come back even better in years to come! Some are divisions from our own gardens, and some we bring in especially for the sale. We have nearly 800 perennials in 41 varieties.

Heirloom tomatoes were the cornerstone of our very first plant sale. Since then, we have increased our number of heirloom choices as well as a few of our favorite hybrid varieties. At last count, we have 1,000 tomatoes in 22 varieties, 380 pep-

pers in 10 varieties, and an assortment of other vegetables and herbs. These plants are started from seed and grown by our volunteers.

Master Gardener volunteers come together from many backgrounds. Whether it is edible or ornamental, we find common ground in our appreciation for growing plants. Whether you are looking for the perfect tomato or the perfect blooming plant, we can help you find it.

Funds from this sale help promote horticulture in Sawyer, Washburn, and Burnett counties.

The sale begins at 8 a.m. on Saturday, May 19, and continues until we sell out. Last year it was about 2 1/2 hours. Come early to get the best choices!

# Book Review: Garden myths unraveled

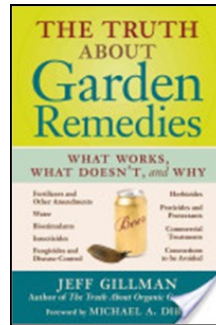
By Sue Reinardy

Every wonder whether a claim in that garden catalog or by a so-called garden expert is really true? There are two books that shed light on how to evaluate those wonder products and folk tales and also give you some scientific basis to refute recommendations that sound a little too good to be true.

Jeff Gillman has written *The Truth about Garden Remedies* that describes what works, what doesn't, and why. He is a professor at the University of Minnesota and has filled this book with easy-to-understand discussion of myths and jargon. He is very respectful of University Extension Service's contribution to a better understanding of horticulture. One great quote in the book that all Master Gardener Vol-

unteers will appreciate is from Dan Horton who said, "Extension is nothing more than the delivery of research-based information to those who can actually use it – doesn't make it more complicated than it is." That describes this book to a tee.

He has organized the book into chapters on each of the major areas that concoctions abound, including: fertilizers, soil amendments, watering, biostimulants, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, and pesticides. His take-home message: "Search for the why behind everything you do



for your plants. Do not settle for unexplained recommendations."

*The Informed Gardener* by Linda Chalker-Scott follows a similar format to Mr. Gillman's book. She is an Extension horticulturist from Washington State University. This book and her follow-up book, *The Informed Gardener Blooms Again*, are based on a collection of columns she has written for the last decade. She has organized her books by myths surrounding how plants work, what/how/when/where to plant, soil additives, mulches, and miracles in a bag/bottle/box.

Both books complement each other and come to similar conclusions about the common myths. Good thing since they both aspire to give us research-based information and both deliver on that promise.

# Demo garden spotlights latest AAS plants

By Sharon Tarras

The All America Selections display garden at the Spooner Ag Research Station is undergoing some major changes this year. In the past, we planted the AAS annuals in one long, narrow space. We will continue using this layout for AAS vegetables. For the annuals, however, we are planning a 50-by-50-foot area with a central meeting space, surrounded by eight naturally shaped plantbeds with five-foot-wide paths between them. This layout will better showcase these beautiful plants.

There is currently a network of nearly 200 dedicated AAS gardens over North America, including 55 locations that have served for 25 years or longer. The earliest AAS Display Garden, Norseco, Inc. of Quebec Canada, became an AAS garden in 1962. Spooner has been an AAS garden site since 2003.

An AAS Display Garden provides the public an opportunity to view the newest AAS winners in an attractive well-maintained setting. Addition-

ally, Display Gardens can provide educational programs about the AAS trialing and award process during "open house" or "field day" events during their peak growing seasons.

Our open house is in the form of a twilight garden tour; this year it will be held on August 21. There will be speakers, demonstrations, tasting of the produce we grow in the gardens.

In addition to the popular Twilight Garden Tour, we will give monthly garden walks through the summer months. We call them "Meet Me at The Garden." They will be held at 6 p.m. June 19, July 17, and September 8. These informal walks will concentrate on what is happening currently at the garden. There may be some insect or disease problems to discuss or maybe just looking at what is in bloom or ready to harvest.

Master Gardener Volunteers will be on hand to answer questions.

All AAS Winners have been "Tested Nationally and Proven Locally®" by the AAS judges. After the judges submit their scores, only the

best performers become AAS Winners.

## 2012 AAS Flower Award Winners

- Ornamental Pepper 'Black Olive'
- Salvia 'Summer Jewel Pink'
- Vinca 'Jams 'N Jellies Black-berry'

## 2012 AAS Vegetable Award Winners

- Pepper 'Cayannetta' F1
- Watermelon 'Faerie' F1

## Gold Medal Winners

- Celosia plumose 'Fresh Look Red' (2004)
- Millet, ornamental 'Purple Majesty' (2003)
- Zinnia 'Profusion White' (2001)
- Zinnia 'Profusion Cherry' (1999)
- Zinnia 'Profusion Orange' (1999)

## More information

For more information, see [www.all-americaelections.org](http://www.all-americaelections.org), the AAS website.





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A publication for gardening enthusiasts from the  
Tri-County area of Burnett, Sawyer, & Washburn