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Genesee County Master Gardener Newsletter
DOWN TO EARTH

2017

VOLUME 15

2



FEATURE ARTICLE
Garden Tidy Up:

How Tidy Should Your Garden Be?

Don't take the garden tidy up too far and eradicate beneficial wildlife on the way!

Every year come fall we get the notion of having to tidy up the garden and get it ready for the next season. The leaves are falling off the trees and shrubs, perennials are dying back and the roses are starting to look tatty.

If you are a conventional...or should I say traditional gardener you get very busy on the last fine days of the fall. Leaves get raked off the lawn and beds, flower beds get a good tidy up and every weed is removed. Vegetable beds are getting dug over in the hope that a frost would break up the hard and lumpy soil. Soon the garden looks pristine and tidy....

But...is this practice really a good idea? If you want your garden to be more natural and function like a balanced ecosystem you want to rethink and question this tradition and maybe adapt it.

The aim of every organic gardener should be to preserve and create habitats for beneficial insects and predatory animals like e.g. hedgehogs, toads or lizards.

A tidy garden is often a very hostile environment for these creatures. They basically can't find a home and they move elsewhere leaving the place to all the **slugs**, bugs, and green flies that will attack your plants once the spring comes around.

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A thick layer of mulch or fallen leaves makes a cozy home for insects like millipedes, beetles, and earthworms. The leaves help them to overwinter and stay protected while they start shredding and decomposing the leaves. The soil underneath it stays healthy and fertile. When doing your garden tidy up pile raked up leaves onto garden beds and around trees and shrubs.

A lot of insects like e.g. mason bees build their nests in hollow stems of plants. Their larvae overwinter in the stems and they emerge in the spring ready to pollinate fruit trees, vegetables, and flowers in your garden. So leave them on the plants in the autumn. If they are still there in the spring they can just become part of the mulch layer.

Piles of wood, twigs, and branches of shrubs and some leaves piled up in a corner of the garden is a great home for hedgehogs to overwinter. Hedgehogs live on slugs and snails, worms, beetles, and caterpillars. Having a few allies like that in your garden is of great benefit!

A pile of larger stones or a dry-stone wall in a sunny spot is a great home for lizards. These creatures are cold-blooded and need to sunbathe to warm up. They live off insects, bugs, caterpillars, worms, small slugs, and flies.

A **bug hotel** is a great way to encourage beneficial insects like mason bees, lacewings, ladybugs, and spiders. But larger bug hotels can also become a home to lizards or hedgehogs. The idea is to create a structure with a lot of small spaces that will provide shelter and nesting space.

Encourage birds into your garden by hanging up **nesting boxes** and providing big **shrubs, trees** and hedges as habitat. They are great at keeping pest populations at bay. A pair of blue tits, for example, feeds around 15.000 caterpillars and flies to its babies within a 3-week period! Also important is, do not disturb the birds during their breeding time in spring and summer. Keep your hedge cutting to late summer and autumn when the birds are finished rearing their young.

Gardens are of course homes to exotic plants. Often those plants don't support the native wild-life species. If you want to encourage a balanced ecosystem in your garden and establish healthy food chains it is a good idea to plant as many native species as you can in your garden. These plants provide food and attract the insects that are the foundation of the food chain. These, in turn, will feed larger animals like birds for example.



HOME GROWN 898

I got my soil test results back for my vegetable garden and it indicates that there is very little organic matter in the soil at 0.5 percent. How can I fix this? I have a number of bags of wood chip mulch that I was going to use under shrubs but I can add it to the garden instead. How much will this help and what will is considered an acceptable percentage of organic matter?

Cancel that idea immediately. You are going to need a source of organic matter that is much more broken down than chips, chunks or flakes of wood. If you mix this into your garden soil, it will be there for decades unchanged. Seeds that end up on pieces of wood mulch will not get enough moisture or nutrients to grow roots. Plants that have too much wood under them cannot find enough area for roots to grow, either. You garden plants will suffer for it. You are aiming for five percent organic matter or slightly more in your soil. If there was an ideal soil, it would be 45 percent minerals, 25 percent air, 25 percent water and five percent organic matter. With the amount of organic matter in your soil, it is probably beach sand. Water and nutrients pass through this soil so fast they make a whistling sound as they rush by. Roots cannot grab either because the sand, with big particles and big pore sizes, does not hold anything. If the soil was clay, the particles would be tiny and the pore spaces would be the same. Roots cannot fight their way through densely packed material. Clay does not drain well and in wet weather, plants could drown as the small amount of air in pore spaces is forced out by water. If the question is how to improve either sandy or clay soils, the answer is the same. Add organic matter. But it is organic matter that has broken down enough that it mixes easily with soil and barely visible. It could be compost or composted manures. It might be mowed up straw that was used to mulch the garden aisles or grass clippings with no weed killers. It might be ground up leaves. But after you mix it into the soil, you cannot find it. Many counties have places that sell compost. It could be a municipality or a private business. They will both be cheaper than buying it by the bag. This fall, mix in four inches of compost divided up. Mix in two inches into the soil and then mix in the last two inches. Dividing it up makes turning it in easier. You would like to get the compost into the soil at least six inches. You can repeat this in the spring. In three years, get another soil test and if you have been adding once or twice a year, you will see the percentage change.

I brought my houseplants indoors and accidentally brought a tree frog with them. I hear it and sometimes see it sitting on a wall. But I am too scared to pick it up. How do I make the frog go outside?

You cannot command the frog to leave. This is going to involve you doing it. You need a small plastic translucent or transparent food container. It just needs to be bigger than the frog. You also need a piece of thin cardboard that is bigger than the width of the container. When you see the frog on the wall, take the food container and rapidly put it over the frog, trapping it inside. Now take the thin cardboard and slip it carefully under the container. Just raise the side of the container slightly. The frog is now containerized. Lift the container and cardboard as one unit. The frog is inside and not damaged. Take Froggy outside and turn it loose. Your tree frog cannot hibernate inside because it is too warm. And there are no insects to eat. So Froggy is doomed. You will find it and remove it now or you will be doing this later when it begins to stink.

Gretchen Voyle, MSU Extension-Livingston County Horticulture Educator 517/546-3950



COOKS CORNER

Classic Marinara Sauce

Julia Moskin

INGREDIENTS

1 28 oz. can whole San Marino tomatoes, certified D.O.P. if possible

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

7 cloves of garlic, peeled and sliced

Small dried whole chili or pinch crushed red pepper flakes

1 tsp. kosher salt

1 large fresh basil sprig or 1/4 tsp. dried oregano. More to taste.

PREPARATION

1. Pour tomatoes in a large bowl and crush with your hands. Pour 1 cup of water in can and slosh around to get tomato juices. Reserve.
2. In a large skillet (do not use a deep pot) over medium heat, heat oil. When hot add garlic.
3. As soon as garlic is sizzling (do not let it brown), add the tomatoes, then add reserved tomatoes water. Add with chili or red pepper flakes, oregano (if using) and salt Stir.
4. Place basil sprig, including stem, on the surface. Let it wilt, then submerge in sauce. Simmer sauce until thickened and oil on surface is deep orange, about 15 minutes. If using oregano, taste sauce after 10 minutes of simmering, adding more salt and oregano as needed, Discard basil and chili.

Another Recipe But Not For You

New Zick Dough: Small Batch

Melt in the microwave and stir together:

1 cup peanut butter

1 cup lard

In a large mixing bowl, combine:

2 cups unmedicated chick starter

2 cups quick oats

1 cup yellow corn meal

1 cup flower

Add melted lard/peanut butter to the dry ingredients and mix well.

Obviously this is a suet for birds

Nancy Szerlag



Meeting Minutes January 19, 2017

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by President Vicki Laurin at 7:15 pm.

Review of Minutes: Motion and 2nd by Alicia Ellis & Kay McCullough to accept the November 17, 2016 meeting minutes as presented. Passed.

Treasurer's Report: Michelle Chockley reviewed the Treasurer's report for December 2016. The beginning balance was \$29,882.99. Income was \$125.25, Expenses were \$695.48 and the ending balance was \$29,322.76

Mel Kennedy - Projects Reports:

Projects

Desert Oasis

Flushing River Trail

Grow Lab

Chairperson

Alicia Ellis / Kay McCullough- grass cutting scheduled for 9 AM March 14, 2017.

Sylvia Hansen- \$57,673 was raised for FRT boardwalk repair. Thanks to those who contributed.

Carol Groat- planting peppers 1st week of February. Check the schedule on Carol's Facebook page.

Alan Grove - Standing Committee Reports:

Banquet (Spring/Awards) Loretta Ellwood- April 20, 2017 is the date!

Bulb Sale Randy Tatro- \$3164 in 2016 bulb and tree sales, yielding \$1582 to MGAGCM.

Bus Trip (Educational) Sabrina VanDyke- date is July 20, 2017. Cost is ~\$45. Visiting: Southern Exposure Herb Farm, Leila Arboretum and 'Clara's on the River' for lunch in Battle Creek and River Street Flowerland Green House in Kalamazoo. More to come as plans get finalized.

Clothing Vicki Laurin / Kay McCullough- next order will be sent in 2-28-17.

DTE Vicki Laurin / George Rappold- ALWAYS looking for articles! We'll help you write one if you have an idea.

Garden Stones Dick Moldenhauer- MG stones available to members for \$30.

Garden Tour (Educational) Kay McCullough- The Garden Tour will be June 25, 2017. There will be an educational emphasis this year and MGAGCM members can get educational hours. Plant stakes will be given to Garden Tour hosts.

Hospitality Gloria Roudebush- Cards to Bob Tritten (foot Surgery), Chris Jensen, Gwen Barney and Mary Wilson.

Outreach Activity Christy Jones- Activities are identified and being quantified for needs, participation, etc.

Public Relations Mel Kennedy- Bee Symposium will be April 17, 2017 at Mott. To send out AG Week info.

Tool and Garden Supplies Dick Moldenhauer- Next order at the end of March 2017.

VMS Ambassadors Ruth Simon / Michelle Chockley- Start putting your hours in beginning 11FE17.

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Old Business:

Weather protocol for cancelling a meeting is if U of M is closed due to weather conditions then our monthly meeting will be cancelled.

New Business:

The date for August membership meeting has been moved to August 10, 2017, because of 'Back to the Bricks' activities a week later.

We are opening the sale of plant stakes to the membership. Plant stakes are \$5 each. Order forms available in the office. Must receive payment to make stakes. Priority to be given to project requests before member requests.

Carol Pittard publicized the Capital Area MG Symposium on January 28, 2017 at MSU. Pam Kvasnicka stated that there are 1189 monarch way stations in Michigan, making MI #1 in the nation!

Thanks to: Alan Grove, Maggie Gregg, Sandy Johnson, Lorna Woods John for providing the snacks at tonight's meeting.

Darren Bagley, MSU Extension Educator, was our speaker tonight, speaking on compost.

Close of Meeting: The meeting was adjourned by President Vicki Laurin at 7:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted: Dick Moldenhauer, MGAGCM secretary

FALL INTO SPRING CONFERENCE 2016

This annual event occurred October 1, 2016, at the Mott Community College Event Center. It was the year of Jan/Janet as this was the name of our first three presenters. First, Janet Macunivich shared with us her vast knowledge and expertise in a presentation about "The Art of Fall Garden Cleanup". She showed us tricks that make the Fall cleanup of our gardens, yards and flower beds easier and faster. Janet was followed by Jan Burns who educated us on "Herbs: How to Grow and Harvest". Along with samples of herbs, Jan gave us various examples of ways herbs can be processed and used.

After a box lunch provided by Battiste Catering at noon and shopping time with our vendors, our first speaker of the afternoon was Jan Bills. Jan gave us insight to practical garden secrets that could make gardening labors easier on our bodies and psyches. As always, our wrap up speaker, George Papadelis, the owner of Telly's Greenhouse and Gardens Center, gave us a great slide show about the new annuals and perennials available for 2017. There are so many to choose from, all kinds and colors. Given his expertise, George was able to give his opinion on which ones he believed would do well in our area.

Our various vendors ranged from metal art to books, pottery, clothing and more. As a result, we were able to raise \$1,715.35 after expense for MGAGCM. I want to thank each and every one of the Fall Into Spring committee members and volunteers. This undertaking would not happen without their help and input. Plans are already being made for our 14th annual conference to be held September 29, 2017. We hope to see you there.

Loretta Ellwood 2007

How to plan your garden tip sheet

No one is likely to eat better than the home gardener who has a well-planned and tended garden. The home gardener can grow fresher vegetables than those bought at the store and grow favorite varieties that are not readily available for purchase. It's not hard to be successful if you know how to get started.

Where to put your garden

For gardening success, it is important to consider the following when picking a location for your garden:

Locate the garden near a **water source**. Sometimes rainfall alone is not adequate for your vegetable plants. You will need to add additional water, and a close water source makes it much easier to provide necessary water without much effort.

The garden should also be **convenient** to your home. It is easier to remember to harvest your crops and tend your garden if you have easy access. A location that you can see from the kitchen will provide a visual reminder to regularly visit the garden.

A **sunny, level spot** that receives six to eight hours of direct sunlight during the day is essential. The location should not be near trees and shrubs whose roots will compete for nutrients and moisture in the soil, as well as shade your garden. Avoid north-facing slopes because these will be colder and shaded. Low areas will also be colder and the soil may stay too wet for extended periods, causing rot and disease problems.

The soil should be loose when you pick it up in your hand, free from toxins, and tested for pH and nutrient availability. The best time to test and prepare the garden soil is in fall. The second best time is in spring, a couple weeks before you plan to plant the garden. Some gardeners add organic matter (compost or peat moss) to improve water drainage in the soil.

Arranging your garden

After choosing a site, the next step is to plan the arrangement of crops in the garden. Consider each of these points carefully.

Garden size

Your garden's size depends on space available, quantity of vegetables, kind of vegetables, and the amount of work and time you plan to devote to the garden. Make the garden just large enough to grow the plants you want, but not so large that it will become a burden and not receive proper care. It is much better to start small; the garden can be enlarged in subsequent years.

Choosing vegetables to plant

Choose vegetables that you and your family enjoy. **Beginners** should start with easy-to-grow varieties such as **tomatoes, zucchini, squash, sweet corn** and **beans**. If your

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garden plot is small, grow mostly crops with a freshness not generally found in stores. These include: asparagus, beans, broccoli, leaf lettuce, peas, radishes, spinach, sweet corn and tomatoes. Plant what you will eat, but think about trying one new vegetable each year.

Some vegetables take up more space, so they should seldom be grown in small gardens (25 feet by 25 feet or smaller). These include: peas, cucumbers, melons, corn, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, potatoes, and squash (vine type).

If a small area is available for the garden, grow crops that are especially productive such as snap beans, tomatoes, radish, lettuce, turnip, onions, greens, carrots and peppers. If you plan to grow tomatoes, it is important to stake or cage these plants to conserve space, make harvesting easier and reduce disease and insect problems.

How much to plant

The amount of each vegetable grown will depend upon the needs and desires of your family. To help plan an adequate amount, refer to the planting chart.

Seeds or transplants?

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Cool season crops, such as lettuce, spinach, radishes, broccoli and cauliflower, may be grown easily from seeds in both spring and fall. Warm season crops, such as tomatoes and peppers, take longer to mature so you may want to purchase transplants or start seeds indoors in early spring, approximately six weeks before planting.

Garden layout

Various vegetables should be grouped in your garden layout according to their growing season requirements and growth characteristics. Plant perennial crops, such as rhubarb and asparagus, along one side of the garden, so they will not be disturbed when you till the soil. Group early planted crops together and wherever possible, plant tall growing crops to the north or west of lower growing crops to avoid shading.

Draw a diagram of the garden site on graph paper. Include the kinds and amounts of vegetables you will plant, the distance between rows and between plants within a row, and the proper time to plant. Remember a north to south layout is ideal for the rows in your garden, if possible. Graph paper is an excellent tool for drawing your diagram.

A **garden diary** is a useful for gardeners. Include the varieties to be planted, planting dates, estimated time to harvest, problems encountered and how you solved them, and quality and quantity of each harvest. These records will help you plan your garden in future years. You may write this information on a calendar or type it into your electronic planner; this way you will have yearly records.

Make the most of your space

Select smaller varieties of vegetables such as patio tomatoes or bush varieties of beans, cucumbers, or melons. Read the back of the seed package to see how much space or area each plant needs.

Another option for gaining space is to grow crops in containers or raised beds. Spacing between plants is reduced in these situations, and walkways are not needed between rows.

Fences can allow you to save garden space by growing vegetables vertically. This works well for peas, cucumbers, squash, and pole beans.

Spacing between rows

Proper spacing between rows is important to allow for growth of plants, ease of cultivation, and efficient use of space. Recommended spacing is given on the seed package; this may help you decide just how much space you will need. Allow enough space between rows for convenient cultivation and access.

Crop rotation

To help prevent common plant diseases that overwinter in soil, it is important not to grow the

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same crop in the same place each year. In a smaller garden, crops may be rotated from one side of the garden to the other.

Cross-pollination

Gardeners need not be concerned about “crossing” between crops if they do not save their own seed. Many closely related vegetables will cross-pollinate (summer squash and pumpkins), but the effect is only on the seed and not on the fruit. So, you can safely plant melons beside cucumbers, red tomatoes next to yellow ones, for example.

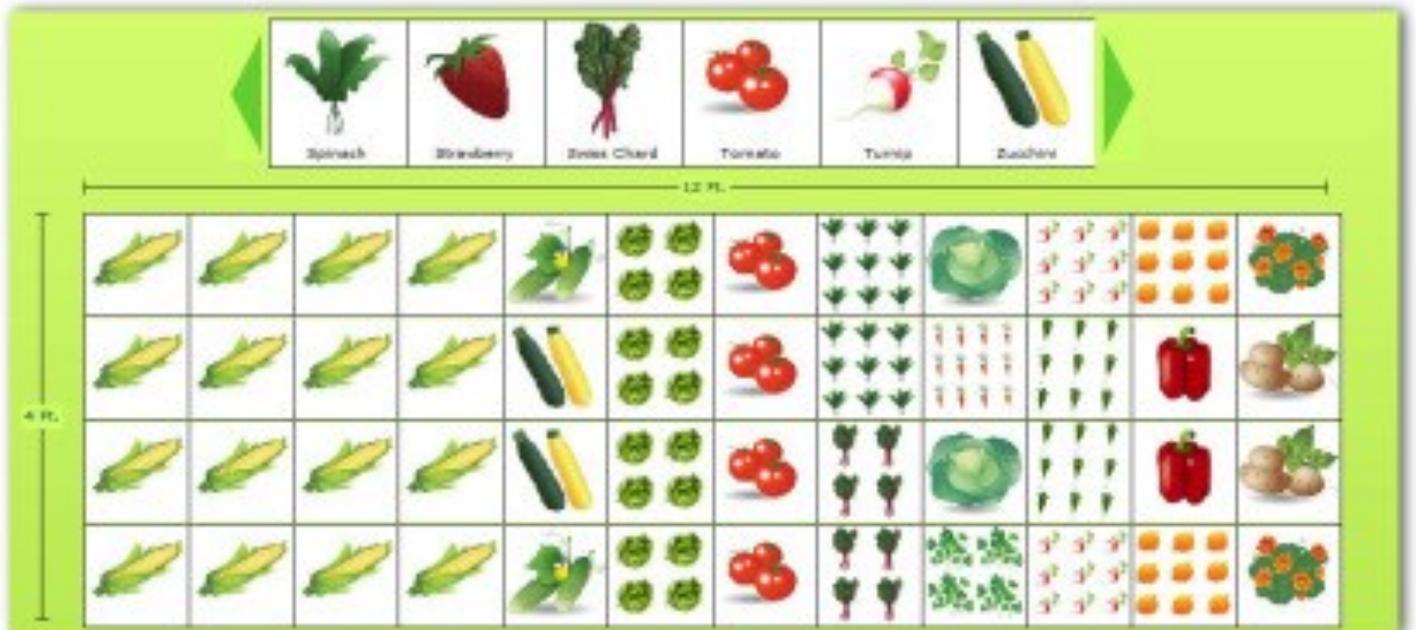
The single exception is sweet corn. Cross pollination in this crop will influence the color, shape and flavor of the kernels.

Supply list

Prepare a list of the supplies that you will need for your garden. This may include:

- Hoses
- Sprinklers
- Protection from Animals
- Seeds and transplants
- Fertilizer
- Staking Material
- Mulch

MSU Extension Articke



\$5.00 MMGA DUES and TIMELINE

Membership approved the 2017 budget which includes our MGAGCM chapter paying for everyone's \$5.00 individual MMGA dues for 2017.

You do not pay \$5.00 to MMGA if you are a chapter member.

Your obligation is paying the \$20.00 to the State of Mi. when you recertify (see below timeline). Emeritus complete agreements when you recertify and do not need to pay \$20.00.

After you complete recertification, you will then need to complete the MGAGCM chapter application and return as instructed on the form.

The Chapter application will be emailed out to everyone by 1/15/17 and will also be available at the next membership meeting 1/19/17.

Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Trainees (EMGVTT) (Spring and Fall 2016 classes), should also complete chapter applications and your \$5.00 MMGA dues will be paid from chapter funds.

A list of our chapter members and payment of everyone's \$5.00 is due to MMGA 4/1/17.

If you have any questions, call Michelle Chockley 810-210-6658.

Winner Type: National **Class:** Zinnia
Variety Name: Profusion **Species:** *hybrida*
Year: 2017 **Common Name:** Zinnia
Type: Flowers from Seed **Breeder:** Sakata Seed Corp.
Close Market Comparison: Profusion Cherry, Zahara Red
Light Needs: Full to partial sun **Water Needs:** Normal
Dead Heading Recommended: No



Sow seed indoors under lights or in a greenhouse and use bottom heat to promote uniform emergence. Select a well-drained media and target a temperature of 75°F/24°C. Moisten the media prior to sowing and then sow the seed. Afterwards, apply a light cover of medium-sized vermiculite. Do not water in the seedlings following sowing or the day after sowing (keep the vermiculite dry). Then, water as needed to maintain uniform moisture. Seeds germinate in about one week. Seedlings may be transplanted into 4-inch/10 cm. pots or cell packs about 3 weeks after sowing or when roots fill the starter cell. Transplant outdoors after all danger of frost is past and the weather is warm and settled. Zinnia Profusion will ultimately grow up to 14 inches/35 cm. tall and 24 inches/60 cm. wide. However, in cooler northern climates, with a shorter growing season, the plants often are smaller. The Profusion Double series is highly disease tolerant, but cool temperatures (below 60°F/15°C) induces disease problems; especially under wet and rainy conditions. Poorly drained soil or overwatering induces root disease. You can enjoy pretty flowers from summer to autumn,

National Garden Bureau AAS winners

DTE Hard Copy

If you haven't signed up for a subscription of the DTE you can still do so by sending a \$10.00 check made out to MGAGCM and mail to PO Box 34, Flushing, Mi. 48433

MGAGCM CLOTHING

The order will be sent February 28, 2017. The website is: geneseecountymg.org/shirt-order.html. After making your selection mail a check made out to MGAGCM to PO Box 34 Flushing, Mi. 48433. All SALES ARE FINAL

Recertification Timeline

Recertification begins Jan. 9 thru Jan. 27 by logging into VMS at any time.

Late recertification begins January 28 thru February 10, 2017 and there is a \$10.00 late fee.

Post-midnight February 10, 2017 recertification will not reopen till January 2018

Welcome Graduates

On behalf of myself and the Master Gardener membership we would like to welcome the 2016 fall class of MGTV graduates. As Master Gardeners we look forward to working with you as you move forward with various projects and continuing education while serving the public. Our association has now grown to 220 members.

Vicki Laurin, President MGAGCM

DATES TO REMEMBER

The Next Meeting Will be on February 16, 2017

At the GCCARD building with social hour starting at 5:30 and the speaker, Roxanne Gabriel, starting at 6:00 PM. Roxanne will be speaking on landscaping. After a short break we will have our business meeting.

Our snack providers are: Loretta Ellwood, Sandy Johnson, Bobbie Parkhill, Margaret Sowle, Alan Grove

March speaker is Jim Withers whose topic is bees.

AWARDS BANQUET

April 20, 2017, is the date of MGAGCM's annual awards banquet. It will be held at Crossroads Village. At this event we get to meet and greet other members of our chapter. We will honor those earned achievement awards during the past year and, for the first time in several years, get to welcome new members to our organization. This makes the 2017 banquet even more special.

A great buffet meal will be served. A presentation is being prepared that allows us a glimpse of the many and various projects in which MGAGCM is involved. This will be a chance to meet our hardworking Board members and make new friends as well as greet old ones.

Please come and join us at this event. Further updates will be in DTE and on our website.

Loretta Ellwood 2007

A Heartfelt Thank You

Thanks to all who contribute to the Flushing Riverview Trail Boardwalk fund raiser to replace the deteriorating wood surface with a longer lasting composite material. We not only reached our goal, we exceeded it by almost \$7,000.00. The goal was \$50,000.00, we raised \$57,000.00. That means for the all or nothing project we will get an additional \$50,000.00 (or more) in matching funds. The work will begin between now and early spring. Dates and details TBD. The Greater Genesee County community really came through, THANKS for your support!

Sylvia Hansen , AMG 1998

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**CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITES**

MMGA Inc Website at:

www.michiganmastergardener.org

MMGA Inc Facebook Page at:

www.facebook.com/MichiganMG

**MGAGCM Website at: Genesee
County MG.org**

MGAGCM Facebook Page at:

**http://facebook.com/groups/2169046
232310/**

Link to VMS: https://

michigan.volunteersystem.org

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