

THE DIRT



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Gardens can provide interest even during the winter

By Lila Hlebichuk, lilahl@yahoo.com

Looking out the window at your winter garden, are you delighted by what you see or is your view the flat expanse of a garden put to bed covered by a blanket of snow?

If the latter is true, February is the perfect time to plan for your future winter garden.

Contrasting shapes, lighting, textures and color can add drama to a barren landscape. In their book *The Prairie Winterscape*, authors Barbara Kam and Nora Bryan remind us, "A sense of balance and harmony is achieved in the garden by using the design principles of repetition, contrasts and focal points."

Hardscapes

Hardscapes in the form of arbors, trellises, benches, fences, walls, fire pits, birdbaths and statuary become more important once their cloak of blooming plants disappears.

An arbor or fence covered by contrasting vines creates visual interest, and even the tool shed or naked larch in the back of the property take on a new life draped in battery-powered fairy lights.

Solar lights marking pathways don't always get enough sunlight, but are beautiful those times they cast light and shadows. Use caution as not all of the items that please us in the summer garden, such as gazing balls, are winter hardy.

Perennials and grasses

Waiting until spring to clean up the garden not only provides food for wildlife, but the seed heads of perennials and grasses add balance and contrast in the landscape.

Some years, perennial seed heads and grasses can be flattened by the snow, but other years the ethereal seed heads and pods, many surrounded by bronze leaves, lend a special beauty to the



Snow covered lights and fencing create a magical winter garden. (Timeline photo, used with permission.)

winter garden.

Some of the perennials to try to add winter interest to your landscape include alliums, *Artemesia*, *Echinacea*, *Helianthus*, Siberian iris, *Monarda*, *Papaver*, *Perovskia*, *Rudbeckia*, *Solidago* and *Yucca*.

Grasses to consider include big bluestem, *Andropogon gerardii* 'Bison,' feather reed, *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster,' blue oat, *Helictotrichon sempervirens*, flame grass, *Miscanthus sinensis* var. *purpurascens*, switchgrass, *Panicum virgatum* 'Northwind,' little bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium* 'Blaze' and prairie dropseed, *Sporobolus heterolepis*.

'Northwind' was the



The airy seedheads and blades of *Panicum virgatum* 'Northwind' bring movement and lightness to a winter garden. (Photo: Mary H. Meyer, University of Minnesota.)

NDSU EXTENSION SERVICE

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Perennial Plant Association Plant of the Year in 2014, and people love it because it doesn't lodge like other switchgrass cultivars, even when it snows, unless it is extreme, according to NDSU horticulturist Esther McGinnis.

Shrubs

Shrubs simply don't get the respect they deserve.

Their many forms and attributes provide contrast, balance, visual interest as well as food and shelter for wildlife. Persistent berries or rosehips can be found on *Cotoneaster acutifolius*, *Shepherdia argentea*, *Viburnum trilobum* 'Wentworth', *Rosa glauca* and *Rosa rugosa*.

Hydrangea arborescens 'Annabelle' and *Spirea x bumalda* 'Anthony Waterer' have interesting seed heads.

The red color of the flame willow (*Salix alba* 'Flame') is dazzling against a snowy backdrop.

More subdued is the red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera* 'Arctic Fire')

Of special winter interest is Harry Lauder's walking stick (*Corylus avellana* 'Contorta').

Junipers come in many shapes, sizes and colors. The color of gold-tipped *Juniperus x pfitzeriana* 'Sea of Gold' deepens in winter, as does the dark solid green of *Juniperus x pfitzeriana* 'Sea Green,' which also has a pleasing arching habit.

Bark

Deciduous trees, having shed their leafy garments, use winter to showcase their colorful or textured bark.

Standouts in the winter garden for their colorful bark include the white paper birch (*Betula papyrifera* 'Prairie Dream') the yellow Niobe weeping willow (*Salix alba* 'Tristis') and the copper amur chokecherry (*Prunus maackii*).

The bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), the hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), and the Kentucky coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioica*) have beautiful textured bark.

The threeflower maple (*Acer triflorum* 'Jack-O-Lantern') has a fissured, exfoliating, amber bark. The river birch (*Betula nigra*) has creamy, exfoliating bark, and the Pekin lilac (*Syringa reticulata* ssp. *pekinensis*, 'SunDak') has exfoliating bark in a coppery-orange hue.

Evergreens

Nothing defines the winter garden more than the iconic snow draped spruce.

The dense pyramid shape of the Colorado spruce is delightful whether a dark green or the bluest of the blues found in the hoops spruce (*Picea pungens* 'Hoopsii').

For the smaller landscape, consider the more compact Montgomery spruce (*Picea pungens* 'R.H. Montgomery') or the steel blue Fat Albert (*Picea pungens* 'Fat Albert').

The Rocky Mountain juniper can also be found in green varieties such as *Juniperus scopulorum* 'Cologreen' and blue varieties such as the NDSU introduction *Juniperus scopulorum* 'Medora.'

The pines with their medium green color and more open form come in both large and dwarf varieties. Standouts include mugo (*Pinus mugo*), Swiss stone pine (*Pinus cembra*), and the rare, but stunning lacebark pine (*Pinus bungeana*).

The American arborvitae *Thuja occidentalis* comes in varieties of different shapes and sizes including the highly recommended Siberian 'Wareana,' the globe-shaped 'Globosa,' the small 'Hertz Midget' and the popular 'Techny.'



The red color of Flame Willow (*Salix alba* 'Flame') stands out in the snow near Kindred, attracting attention and deer. (Photo: Rachel Brag.)



Colorado spruce (*Picea pungens*) is elegantly draped in snow near Mohall. (Photo: Arlene Schelling, Mohall.)

Birds, boughs, berries and lights

Well-stocked bird feeders and a water source, such as a heated birdbath, bring a host of winter visitors to delight with their cheery antics and sounds.

If your garden consists of a deck or balcony, all is not lost.

Wreaths and winter-proof containers with evergreen boughs, long branches or stems with or without seed heads, and berries make wonderful winter gardens for those short on space. Low voltage lighting can add drama on the bleakest of winter days.

For further reading:

"The Prairie Winterscape, Creative Gardening for the Forgotten Season" by Barbara Kam and Nora Bryan

NDSU Yard & Garden Report, "Landscaping for Winter" by Tom Kalb

NDSU Spring Fever Garden Forum 2014, "Barkophiles: Why We Love Bark" by Todd West



Hofsommer takes home Ron Smith award for service with refugee families

By Esther E. McGinnis, esther.mcginis@nds.edu

On one of the coldest nights of the year, the Master Gardener Awards banquet celebrated the warmth and generosity of North Dakota Master Gardener volunteers and interns.

This event, held Jan. 15 in the NDSU Alumni Center in Fargo, drew more than 65 Master Gardeners and their spouses from around the state.

After an appetizer social and live music, guests were treated during dinner to a humorous look at a day in the life of Cass County Extension agent Todd Weinmann.

Weinmann, a 16-year veteran of the Extension Service, shared stories of unusual horticultural diagnoses and even more bizarre clients.

At the end of his presentation, Weinmann became the first recipient of the Friend of the Master Gardener Program Award. This is a new award that honors NDSU personnel who provide notable support to the Master Gardener Program.

Program Director Esther McGinnis spoke on the state of the Master Gardener program, which grew from 71 active Master Gardeners in 14 counties in 2013 to 151 Master Gardeners in 32 counties in 2015.

In 2015, Master Gardener volunteers and interns reported 6,752 volunteer hours. In addition, 4,338 pounds of fresh garden produce were donated to local food pantries in cooperation with the N.D. Department of Agriculture's Hunger Free Garden Project.

In total, Master Gardeners planted and maintained 75 gardens in 21 counties across the state. These included ornamental gardens at churches, cemeteries, museums, libraries, veterans' memorials, nursing homes, medical centers, parks, and schools.

Other individuals organized and maintained community vegetable gardens and orchards. Master Gardeners also volunteered at the International Peace Garden, three zoos, the Former Governor's Mansion State Historic Site, Bonanzaville, Frontier Village and West Acres.

To acknowledge work of Master Gardeners in our state, the Awards Committee sought to honor exemplary volunteerism.

New award categories were created to give accolades to individuals who completed more than 100 volunteer hours in 2015. The 100 Hour Service Club winners are Diane Byrum (Ward County), Bette Furgeson (Bottineau County), Emily Hilgers (Cass County), Kathleen Johnson (Cass County), Marlene Maxon (Grand Forks County), Cindy McLean (Cass County), Wanda Nelson (Mountrail County), Jen Sahr (Cass County), and Penny Seifert (Richland County).

Anita Hofsommer (Cass County), Terrie Mann (Grand Forks County), and Kris Schipper (Cass County) were inducted into the 200 Hour Service Club.

Four new awards were announced for superior volunteer projects.

The new Feeding the Hungry Award was bestowed on Cass County's Kris Schipper for growing and donating more than 1,300 pounds of fresh produce to the local food pantry.

Husband and wife team Jen and CJ Sahr won the Working with the Elderly Award for starting more than 1,000 annuals in their garage under grow lights, planting them at the Touchmark



The winners of the 100- and 200-Hour Service Club awards are Jen Sahr, Diane Byrum, Emily Hilgers, Wanda Nelson, Kris Schipper, and Penny Siefert



Newly certified Master Gardeners are (back row): Emily Hilgers, Ruth Bracken, Rachel Brag, Diane Byrum, Myla Alsaker and Harold (Hal) Rosenheim; (front row): Wanda Nelson, Lila Hlebichuk and Julie Orr



Kris Schipper received the Feeding the Hungry Award, and Jen and CJ Sahr won the Working with the Elderly Award.

Retirement Community in Fargo, and maintaining them for the season.

Newly certified Master Gardener Zach Peterson received the Working with Underserved Populations Award. Using a Master Gardener grant, Peterson built square foot gardens at New Life Center and Charism in Fargo. He then taught these families in crisis how to grow vegetables.

The Dirt Newsletter Committee was honored for their work in starting the official quarterly newsletter of the N.D. Master Gardener program. Laura Kourajian, Rena Mehlhoff, Rachel Brag, Lila

Hlebichuk and Bethany Foyt received the Communications Award for their professionalism.

Finally, the most prestigious of the Master Gardener awards, the Ron Smith Community Service Award, was awarded to Anita Hofsommer for her work with refugee families.

She is a dynamic part of an interfaith group called Growing Together that teaches refugee families how to garden and feed themselves. In addition, she teaches food preservation and helps run Growing Together's farmers market on 25th Street South in Fargo.

The Ron Smith Community Service Award was created in 2014 to honor the NDSU Extension Horticulturist's 27 years of service to the state of North Dakota.

Next year, the Master Gardener program will add awards to honor those individuals who work with youth.



Anita Hofsommer is the winner of the Ron Smith Community Service Award



The Ron Smith Community Service Award celebrates Ron Smith's 27 years of public service as Extension horticulturist

North Dakota is home to exotic, unique and threatened orchid

By Rena Mehlhoff, rena.mehlhoff@gmail.com

The western prairie fringed orchid (*Plantanthera praeclara*) is an exotic and unique plant of the prairie grasslands.

The orchid is considered to be North Dakota's rarest plant and is listed as a threatened species.

The orchid is a smooth, perennial herb, growing from 2 ½ to 4 feet tall. The stalks bear up to 24 showy (1-inch-wide) white flowers, with the lower petal of each flower being deeply 3-lobed and fringed.

Vegetative shoots emerge in late May and flowers often emerge in mid-June to late July. The entire plant can display flowers for about three weeks, with individual flowers lasting up to 10 days.

The orchid releases its fragrance only in the evenings, relying on hawk moths for pollination.

According to a 2010 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Recovery Plan, North Dakota had 5,000 plants located in 71 sites.

The Sheyenne National Grasslands in the southeastern part of the state contains about 90 percent of this population. North Dakota has one of the three largest orchid populations in North America; the other two are in Minnesota and Manitoba, Canada.

Plants growing in North Dakota live three years or less and show higher rates of mortality than Minnesota plants.

The Western prairie fringed orchid was first documented by the Lewis and Clark expedition (under the name *Habenaria leucophaea*) in what is now Wyoming, and has experienced at least a 60 percent decline from historic levels. Presently, populations are known in North

Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, and Manitoba. It appears to be lost in South Dakota and Oklahoma.

The decline of the western prairie fringed orchid is directly linked to the conversion of prairies to cropland. Approximately 80 percent of the North Dakota prairie is gone with about 95 percent loss in the Red River Valley alone.

Contact with herbicides and insecticides also have an adverse effect on the orchid and pollinators. In addition, invasive species, such as the leafy spurge, commonly invade and often out-compete native orchids.

A 2015 study also cites nectar thievery to have a possible negative impact on the orchid as well.

Over the course of 11 years, researchers collected the orchid's pollinator, the hawk moth. Among the specimens collected were two hawk moth species not common in North Dakota. The tongues of these southern moths are twice as long, allowing them to eat nectar without providing pollination services.

The findings of this study are important because nectar thievery can be a threat to the conservation of rare plants.

What Can I Do to Help?

As Master Gardeners, we can help preserve native plants, such as the western prairie



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fringed orchid, through education, outreach and public awareness. We can educate ourselves on native plants, invasive species, pollinators and wildlife interactions and then pass along this knowledge to others.

Resources:

- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service – Fact Sheet: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/plants/prairie.html>
- North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department - Western prairie fringed orchid brochure: http://www.parkrec.nd.gov/nature/attachments/prairie_fringed_orchid_landowners_guide.pdf
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources - Western prairie fringed orchid brochure: http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/natural_resources/ets/fringed_orchid.pdf
- Nectar thieves are damaging rare orchids in North Dakota article: http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2015-10/esoa-nta092915.php

Growing Together: 10 years & growing stronger

By Bethany Foyt, bethany@thepartnerchannel.com

“**G**rowing Together - a Community Garden Ministry” started as an idea in a group of concerned members at Olivet Lutheran and First United Methodist Churches, Fargo, in 2006.

They wanted to create a safe place for refugee families to find a sense of community in the Fargo area and, wow, have they succeeded!

In their 10th year, Growing Together is growing strong in vegetables and numbers.

From a small garden with eight families in 2006 to six community gardens with 150 families participating and more than 50 active volunteers, this organization cannot be stopped.

Not only does the group foster valuable community relationships amongst refugee families, they grew more than 45,000 pounds of vegetables in 2015 while feeding more than 150 families.

Growing Together’s gardening techniques, such as wide row, intercropping, and succession planting, means a surplus of food for the families to take home and even pay it forward to others in need.

Selection of crops, like eggplant, choy, mustard, and amaranth are not normally grown in the North Dakota climate, but refugee families from Liberia, Bhutan, Iraq, Somalia, Rwanda, and many other countries request a wide variety of different vegetables.

Jack Wood, program organizer, explained, “By using the NDSU greenhouse to help us lengthen the season, we’ve seen some great success with our unique selection of crops.”

Growing Together accomplishes all of this and also helps churches in the Fargo-Moorhead area start their own community gardens.

Nativity, Golden Ridge Lutheran, Calvary Methodist, Triumph Lutheran, Brookdale Baptist, and First Congregational Church are just a few of the churches to benefit.

“Every single garden we’ve helped out has been a success and is still going today.” Jack said.

The group put together a community garden tool kit that outlines everything you need to know in starting a garden, including seasons, tools, harvesting, clean up, and even seed



Growing Together gardeners at The Gathering garden. (Photo: Growing Together-A Community Garden Ministry Facebook page.)



A little boy looks over shares of the harvest lined up for distribution at the Enterprise garden in Fargo. (Photo: Growing Together-A Community Garden Ministry Facebook page.)

Fargo Locations of Growing Together Gardens:

- Community Homes: 702 23rd St. S.
- The Gathering: 3910 25th St. S.
- LSS Gardens (Elder and Enterprise): 3911 20th Ave. S.
- The World Garden: 4415 18th Ave. S.
- The Catalyst West Garden: 1800 21st Ave. S.

sources.

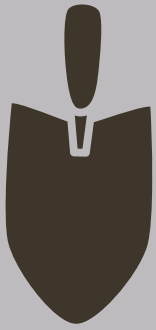
Growing Together has a solid group of core volunteers, and the number of people interested in helping has also grown over the past couple of years.

Volunteers Jack Wood, Kathy Johnson, Mindy Grant and Nola Storm just completed the 2015 Master Gardener core course. Volunteer Anita Hofsommer also is a Master Gardener and received the Ron Smith Community Service Award for her work in the

gardens.

As core volunteers, these organizers look to continue to grow service to their community through the great work of their community garden ministry.

Interested in volunteering at one of the gardens this spring? Or do you wish to start your own community garden? Contact Jack Wood at Jackstomatoes@gmail.com for more information.



Something to look forward to: SPRING AND SUMMER GARDEN SHOWS

February 18-21

Minnesota Home & Patio Show, St. Paul RiverCentre.
www.homeandpatioshow.com.

February 26-28, Mar. 4-6:

Minneapolis Home + Garden Show, Minneapolis Convention Center. Featuring Drew and Jonathan Scott of HGTV's Property Brothers. www.homeandgardenshow.com.

April 2:

West Otter Tail Gardening Day, Fergus Falls, Minn.

April 9:

30th Annual Gardening Saturday, Alerus Center, Grand Forks. Featuring Cole Burrell.

April 14:

Pretty Bloomers Gardening Night, Breckenridge, Minn.

April 15-16:

Dakota Garden Expo, Bismarck Event Center, Bismarck.
www.dakotagardenexpo.production.townsquareblogs.com.

July 14:

Williston REC Field Day (includes horticulture program).

July 15:

Williston REC High Tunnel Field Day.

July 19:

Carrington REC Fruit Project Tour.

July 28-30:

ND State Horticultural Society and NDSU Master Gardeners Conference, Grand Forks.

We can spin winter any way you want, but the truth is, to gardeners, in the dead of winter, spring is always too far away. We look forward, with longing, to the first of our perennials poking through the ground, often under the cover of snow.

Part of looking forward involves attending garden shows, gathering new ideas like flowers in a basket and rubbing elbows with fellow gardeners also anxious to get dirt under their fingernails.

Get your calendars out, and start planning your spring and summer tour of shows with this list. Gardening seminars and sessions count toward the eight hours of continuing education required to be a certified master gardener. (That requirement is waived for new MG interns who just completed the 40-hour core course.)

Esther McGinnis, the NDSU horticulturist in charge of the Master Gardener program, said there will be monthly continuing education webinars available to Master Gardeners starting in February.

She will be sending out information on speakers as they are lined up.



Have a story idea?

Email Laura Kourajian at lkourajian@yahoo.com or contact one of our writers directly.