

The City Seedling

A Publication of Master Gardeners of Greater Detroit in conjunction with MSU Extension - Wayne County

Grassroots Effort Saves Horticulture Agent Position

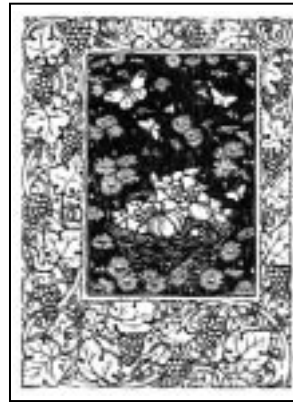
By Sue Hanson, MGGD Volunteer Coordinator

In early August, Kristine Hahn started to say "Good-bye" to all of us because the Horticulture Agent position was being eliminated from the Wayne County budget. We all know that many employers are tightening their belts and services are being cut in order to save money. It didn't make sense, however, to remove the only link Wayne County has with the MSU Extension Office in East Lansing. It also didn't make sense to lose the Horticulture Hotline, the special Detroit Agriculture Network classes and possibly the Master Gardener Program. Seeing as we had just gone through a similar crisis at the State level to keep the Extension Service from being cut, it was hard to believe that we had to continue the fight at the local level.

Wayne County's Executive Robert Ficano stated that the only way to save Kristine's position was to contact our Commissioners, the only parties who could act to restore anything to the County budget at that point in time. So,

the word went out to Master Gardeners and others to contact their Commissioners and let them know how much of a negative impact the removal of the Horticulture Agent would have on all of us.

Letters, telephone calls, and



e-mails went out and our Commissioners heard us. In fact, every single Commissioner received communications asking that the Horticulture Agent be reinstated! As a result, when the Commissioners met to discuss and vote on the budget, they decided

unanimously to reinstate Kristine's position. In a subsequent newsletter, Commissioner Christopher Cavanagh explained that he and the other Commissioners voted to reinstate the position specifically because of their constituents' outcry.

I had an opportunity to speak with Commissioner Kay Beard shortly after the budget vote and I asked if our calls and letters had really made a difference. "Absolutely!" she responded. She also indicated that it is sometimes difficult to identify what goes into a budget change and she very much appreciated being informed that the elimination of the Horticulture Agent was part of the contemplated cuts.

Thanks to everybody who acted upon our request and contacted their Commissioners! Congratulations - we worked together and made a positive impact! It's nice to know that we can make a difference at the local level!

Greetings From the President of MGGD

By Beverly Donaldson

As we settle into slightly longer days and chilling nights, we hope that you have plenty of bulb and seed catalogs handy to keep you dreaming of the thaw ahead and your spring and summer gardens.

Last fall, during our September meeting, Peter Bray gave some insight into how the Brix content of fruits and vegetables is measured, which in turn

gave us an idea of how nutritious our produce is. Many people brought fruits and vegetables from their gardens. Ed Krappman brought a wonderful cornucopia filled with the many different varieties of tomatoes he grows to share with us all. Cheryl English, our MGGD Treasurer has written a detailed article in this issue summarizing Peter's talk. We hope you enjoy it and find it informative

We are hosting some extraordinary speakers with great topics in the coming months that you won't want to miss. Mark your calendars for the fourth Wednesday of each month and bring a friend or two.

Details of our upcoming yearly potluck and raffle get-together with the members of the Detroit Garden Center are forthcoming.

We hope to see you soon!



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and more...

Call the MGGD
Message Line:

313-438-6079

For the most
up-to-date meeting
info as well as new
announcements.

Emerald Ash Borer Update October 2004

By Kristine Hahn, Consumer Horticulture Agent, MSU Extension Wayne County

Several new developments regarding the Emerald Ash Borer ("EAB") were raised at the Midwest Emerald Ash Borer Symposium in Novi, Michigan, October 14-15, 2004. You may (or may not!) be surprised to know I met representatives from as far away as South Carolina at this symposium who are concerned about and want to protect their ash resources!

New research indicates that the EAB may have a longer larval period than previously believed. It may take up to two years for the larval stage to develop into the adult form of the insect, as rather than one year. This longer larval stage means a longer period for the larvae to feed on our ash trees, translating into changes in the insecticide treatments currently recommended for pest management. Another new change is a plan

initiated by the Governor's office with the Michigan Departments of Agriculture and Management and Budget that significantly lowers the cost for the removal of trees impacted by the EAB in Michigan's 13-county quarantine area. Contracts are expected to be in place by December 1, 2004.

Homeowners can benefit from this program only through their local government units but should avoid contacting local officials until the end of the year to allow communities the opportunity to assess whether they will participate in and complete enrollment for the program. It should be noted that the Michigan Forestry and Parks Association (MFPA) does not support the proposed contract tree removal system, as the organization feels it will drive currently low tree-care prices

even lower. Additionally, the majority of smaller tree-care companies do not have the capacity to bid on these contracts and may be pushed out of the tree removal market. MFPA stated that it is willing to work with the state to develop a contract system it can support.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture has requested that MSU Extension and their volunteers assist with the surveying of ash trees in the quarantine area for these removal contracts, a definite change from 2002 when they weren't interested in volunteer surveys of Wayne County ash trees. So, stay tuned !!

Last, but not least, MSUE Wayne County recently received grant funds for additional EAB educational outreach programs to varied audiences, including homeowners, school children, decision makers and professional developers

and planners. Announcements of the dates and locations of these programs will be announced soon.

If you want to find out more about EAB, go to: www.emeraldashborer.info.



Membership Update

By Art Campbell, Membership

As of October 20, 2004, 42 of last year's 50+ MGGD members had renewed for 2004/5. Keeping this in mind, I wanted to share some thoughts on what it means to me to be a Master Gardener and a member of Master Gardeners of Greater Detroit.

Master Gardeners provide valuable services and resources to their communities. We all had different reasons for becoming Master Gardeners, but getting certified was the beginning, not the end.

As you know, we are expected to stay abreast of changes concerning Master Gardeners. MGGD has made it one of its goals to help its members meet the annual requirements - by providing an

educational hour at each meeting, through Barb Hayes's programming genius, while Sue Ann Hanson keeps us up-to-date about volunteer opportunities. Maybe the meetings are not on a good night for some of us - so MGGD makes sure you know about other activities available through other groups.

I do not believe we became Master Gardeners as an end. We serve a meaningful purpose through our membership in MGGD. Even if you cannot always attend the meetings or volunteer activities, your membership in the Master Gardeners of Greater Detroit goes a long way to supporting the Master Gardener presence in Detroit. Stay on board and re-certify. Renew your mem-

bership - you get a lot for the \$10 annual membership fee. Detroit is a better place,

thanks to your membership in MGGD.



Brix and Getting the Best Produce Out of Your Garden

By Cheryl M. English

If you've been considering going organic for the produce you buy, or even grow yourself, you may have been wondering how organically-grown and conventionally-grown foods stack up in terms of nutritional value. For some time now, organic foods have been promoted as healthier simply because they don't contain potential toxins from the chemical fertilizers and pesticides in general use. There is also a way to measure their relative nutritional value, and the news is good: Organically grown foods are not only less likely to contain toxins and carcinogens; they are also generally more nutritious and the means for growing them make for more sustainable agricultural methods over the long term.

Brix

Wine makers have long relied on something referred to as the "specific gravity" of the fruits they use in their business to determine their readiness for harvest and transformation into a fine wine. Grapes are measured, using a device called a refractometer, to determine the quantity of solids in solution and their sugar content and, therefore, their value in contributing to a quality vintage.

This measurement of a fruit (or vegetable's) specific gravity is referred to as "Brix." By taking a small portion of the fruit or vegetable and putting it through a garlic press to extract its sap and coating a lens on the refractometer with it, a reading can be made indicating that fruit or vegetable's Brix. The reasoning is that the higher the specific gravity, or Brix, the higher the sugar content and, as sugar molecules carry nutrients in solution, the higher the overall nutritional value of the fruit or vegetable.

Numerous charts have been developed reflecting the relative Brix values of organic and non-organic fruits and vegetables.

Consistently, organically-grown produce registers a higher Brix reading. The Brix level of onions ranges from 4 (poor) to 13 (excellent). Therefore, high-quality onions have more than three times the quantity of dissolved solids; apples have three times (18:6), potatoes have over two times (7:3) and tomatoes more than four times (18:4).

Obviously, if a given quantity has more nutrients in it, you don't need to eat as much in order to get those nutrients. For example, four ounces of home-grown potatoes are just as filling as a larger quantity of conventionally-grown potatoes you purchased at your local grocery store. This fact has been born out in dairy cattle: those grazing on higher-Brix alfalfa; and a 50% increase in alfalfa's Brix level can increase milk yields 10 to 12 percent.

High-Brix plants are also more resistant to insect pests and plant diseases. In fact, high-Brix plants are generally hardier - even surviving frost better because of their higher sugar content. It is well documented that insects and diseases tend to gravitate to weaker plants, while healthier plants generally repel such pathogens. The exact reasons for this are unclear - whether the plant "broadcast" its status for prospective pests or more robust plants are simply harder to eat. One measurable characteristic that distinguishes healthy plants from relatively unhealthy ones is their relative Brix levels.

Peter Bray, a long-time advocate of organic gardening shared the benefits of his experience with organic gardening with MGGD members on September 29, 2004. Inviting attendees to bring their own home-grown (or store-bought) organic (or otherwise) fruits and

vegetables, Mr. Bray gave everyone the chance to see the technique in action, from preparing the sample to making and compiling readings. Organically-grown samples consistently attained higher Brix ratings than non-organic samples.

How to Improve Your Brix

Mr. Bray also shared some techniques to improve the Brix for your own, home-grown produce. Although some adherents suggest the simple application of an organic source of sugar (such as organically-made molasses) is the answer,

activity in the soil, which will increase the amounts of mineral nutrients available to your plants. Magnesium, phosphorus, calcium and boron all contribute to the production and transportation of plant sugars.

You will also need to avoid using herbicides and artificial nitrogen fertilizer - both inhibit biological activity in the soil. Herbicides may or may not kill weeds, but they definitely kill soil bacteria - indiscriminately. Application of artificial nitrogen results in lush, green plants, but it also uses up soil humus more quickly than it can be replaced. If you need additional nitrogen in your soil, do so through growing legumes in your plant rotation rather than applying artificially-produced nitrogen.

Third, and finally, you need to balance the minerals in your soil. This means soil testing. Correct any mineral deficiencies revealed by soil tests and avoid creating excesses - which are much more difficult to correct. If you correct mineral deficiencies according to recommendations on the soil test, it is more likely the different minerals will come into better balance with one another. This is important because a proper balance of soil minerals is required for efficient photosynthesis, which is the production of sugars. When balancing your soil minerals, use naturally-occurring mineral forms wherever possible, and add more compost (humus) at the same time.

By using the organic approach, you can have healthier, hardier plants over all, not just better-tasting fruits and vegetables. By following these guidelines, you can create a disease- and pest-resistant garden that is inviting to beneficials (pollinators, for example). It follows that this approach will make for a healthier garden overall, whether you're interested in fresh fruits and vegetables or a beautiful floral display.



on the theory that it would increase sugar and, therefore, nutritional content, the equation is not so simple. Rather, it is by following the tenants of organic gardening - use of organic soil amendments and techniques instead of "quick-fixes."

First of all, by boosting soil humus and continuing to increase it aids in growing high-Brix plants. Soil is supposed to be (at least) five percent organic matter. Well, if five percent organic matter in your soil is good, ten percent is even better, if you're trying to grow highly-nutritious, organic produce. By increasing organic matter in the soil, you are increasing biological





Palm Sunday Orchid Program: Michigan Orchid Society

The Michigan Orchid Society would like to extend a warm welcome to all Master Gardeners for our hands-on Orchid Program this year. It will consist of:

A Blooming Size Orchid, Orchid Potting Mix, A Pot, and a Demonstration on potting orchids (please bring an apron, sterilized pruners, and gloves).

A talk, "Orchid Growing Made Easy" from Ron Ciesinski of Taylor Orchids, (Ron has more than 40

years experience with growing orchids and has won countless awards for his Beautiful plants. A down to earth speaker on the do's and don'ts of growing orchids).

A Question & Answer Period.

Cost: \$10.00 (make checks payable to Taylor Orchids)

Where: Laurel Park Place Mall, 37700 W. Six Mile Rd., Livonia

When: March 20, 2005

Time: 10:00am

Registration is limited. Please send your name, address, phone#, and your check to: MOS/ Rosie Kiley, 22306 Kramer, St. Clair Shores, MI 48080

Volunteers are needed Thurs. and Fri. Evening and very much appreciated. If you can help please contact: Rosie Kiley 586-776-6222 or Rosiekiley@gliis.net



Wayne County

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Cornell Website Helps Gardeners Choose Vegetable Varieties

ITHACA, N.Y. Gardeners poring over seed catalogs this winter have a new resource to help them choose which vegetable varieties to grow.

The Cornell University Department of Horticulture website www.cce.cornell.edu/veg profiles more than 2,000 varieties. Gardeners can search or browse for varieties, view details for each

including how long they take to mature, and find links to seed companies that sell the variety.

"Our Vegetable Varieties for Gardeners website makes it easy for gardeners to compare varieties and become more aware of the wide diversity of varieties that are available," says Lori Bushway, Senior Extension Associate.

Bushway is especially excited about the feature that allows gardeners to rate and review varieties. The site was developed and is hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension. If gardeners want to rate varieties not yet listed on the site, they can add them to the database through an online form.

About Our Organization...

Master Gardeners of Greater Detroit is comprised of members from the Metro Detroit area with a focus on the East Side communities. We are a non-profit organization and our mission is to improve the community as a whole through

education and volunteer activities in the area of gardening and the environment for homeowners, individuals, metropolitan neighborhood or community groups.

Our meetings are the fourth Wednesday of each month at the

location stated within our calendar of events. Our President, Bev Donaldson, extends a personal invitation for you to attend and bring a friend. Call our hotline at 313-438-6079 for meeting details. Please join us!