

# MSU IN BLOOM

## MSU HORTICULTURE GARDEN NEWS



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

Houseplant & Succulent Sale (tentative)

Nov 5

Holiday Open House

Dec 5

# FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

BY KRISTIN GETTER, DIRECTOR OF THE MSU HORTICULTURE GARDENS

I hope this newsletter finds all of you doing well and perhaps enjoying your own garden or ours. Our college administration finally allowed our staff and five students (about 1/3 of what we normally have) to be able to work outside in the Gardens this summer, using social distancing and recommended CDC COVID-19 practices. Since we have so few students this year, our wedding coordinator (Amy) and I have been working in the Gardens three mornings a week. In past summers, I was so busy teaching or running a study abroad program that I did not have time to be in the Gardens helping. As my study abroad has been postponed and my summer online teaching is going smoothly, it is a real treat for me to be on site in the Gardens more this summer.

We are especially focused on weeding in the Annual Trial Gardens, as the industry relies on these trials to evaluate how their plants perform in Michigan. We have added a new Trial Garden bed for our shaded trials, next to the Center for Integrative Plant Sciences building (see below).

Our old shade trial bed is not shaded right now as we took out the crab apple trees (which had been deteriorating for years due to apple scab) and replaced them with red Maples. A big shout-out of thanks to Cottage Gardens for donating these trees! In addition, Masterpiece Flower Company generously donated over 1,500 geraniums to fill the beds.

In other news, we are sad that our June weddings have all been canceled or rescheduled, just like our April and May weddings were. We are hopeful that perhaps late-July and August weddings will be allowed on campus.



Our new temporary shaded trial bed next to the Center for Integrative Plant Sciences building (excuse our weeds-we are doing our best with less staff!).



Our old shade garden beds are temporary sun beds after removing scab-infested crab apples and replacing them with red Maples (donated by Cottage Gardens). Masterpiece Flower Company donated over 1,500 geraniums to fill these beds.

## What does working in a public university garden look like during a pandemic?

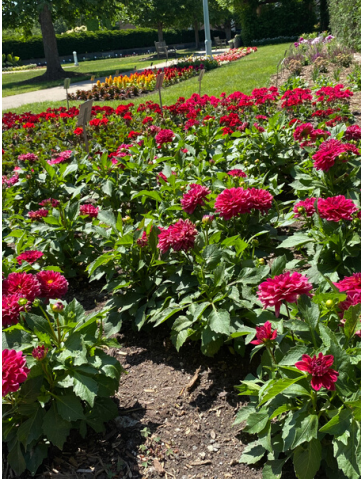
Even though our Governor has lifted the stay-at-home order, MSU is still working through how to safely bring employees back to campus. As of this writing, any MSU employee who can work from home is required to do so. Of course, our staff cannot maintain garden beds from home. So, our staff must follow a few rules to keep them safe. For instance, we each must fill out an online health questionnaire every day before coming to work (attesting to our good health), fill out an online log of when we enter and leave work, wear masks whenever we are in enclosed spaces, stay 6 feet apart from each other at all times, and sanitize common tools and workspaces before and after each use.



Liberty Hyde Bailey is following our COVID-19 protocols too.

# TRIAL GARDENS IN FULL SWING

BY KRISTIN GETTER, DIRECTOR OF THE MSU HORTICULTURE GARDENS

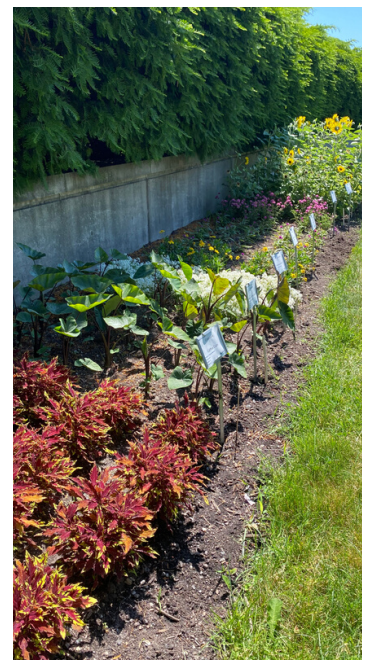


Our Michigan State University (MSU) Trial Gardens have successfully planted all our annual and perennial trials this summer, despite limited staffing due to COVID-19 restrictions on campus. While all other Garden events had to be cancelled this spring and summer, we successfully received an exemption from college administration to allow the Trials to continue to support the industry. This year we are evaluating over 200 varieties including annuals, perennials, and vegetables.

Our Trial Gardens are also in their second year of expanded trial data collection. We now provide three reports (early-, mid-, and late- season results) with pictures, each including multiple indices scoring on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), including:

- Plant vigor – Does it fill in its space and establish quickly?
- Plant Uniformity – Do all plants in the cultivar entry look similar?
- ‘WOW’ factor – A measure of flower power for flowering plants and/or the color, uniqueness, etc for foliage plants.
- Pest and Environmental Stress [scored as needed] – Is the cultivar resistance to problems?
- Overall Score – An average of the above measurements.

Results of the trials are posted on our website at the end of the growing season. Anyone is able to visit the Trials, located in our Annual Garden. Any of the beds that are planted with the same species in square blocks are a trial, with a tag in front identifying that species and cultivar, like the picture to the right.



# GARDENING AND TICKS

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BY KRISTIN GETTER, DIRECTOR OF THE MSU HORTICULTURE GARDENS

Are you spending a lot of time gardening outdoors this summer? If so, depending on your location and surrounding vegetation, you may be at risk for encountering ticks. Researchers at MSU's Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, along with those at the University of Wisconsin and Columbia University, have developed an app to help you identify and report ticks in your area. With the goal of reducing tickborne disease and improving the health of Michiganders, they hope that The Tick App will help prevent even more tick bites this summer!



## **What is The Tick App about?**

In few words, Lyme disease prevention and citizen science. The Tick App is a smartphone application that shows you how you can avoid ticks and also invites you to share information with scientists about your tick exposure and what kinds of locations and activities are associated with them. In addition, you can submit photos of ticks for timely species identification by an expert. The goal is to develop better strategies to prevent tick bites and tick-borne diseases.

## **How can I get the app?**

You can download The Tick App on [GooglePlay](#) and/or [iTunes](#) for smartphones. If you don't have a smartphone, or would like to participate on your desktop, you can fill out the same [questionnaires here](#).

## **Please note**

Besides being a reliable and handy resource about ticks and tick prevention, the Tick App is a research study in which you can contribute as a Citizen Scientist. Thus, you will need to provide consent to the research and complete an entry survey (which takes 5 -10 minutes). You will then receive a weekly to monthly message to start your `daily log`. The daily log should take about a minute to complete. It asks if you or a household member encountered a tick, what you did that day and how COVID influenced your outdoor activities. When you start the daily log, you will receive a daily reminder until you complete 15 logs. In addition, you will have the option to complete `tick reports`, to log your tick encounters and when you submit a picture, we will respond to you by email what tick we think it is. Lastly, if you allow location services, the app will use your location to provide you with current information on blacklegged `tick activity` in your area. Furthermore, location services will help researchers understand how time spent in different areas is associated with tick exposure.

## **For more information**

Visit [The Tick App Website](#).

# VOLUNTEERS POST-COVID

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BY BETHANY TROY, PERENNIAL GARDEN MANAGER

We are fortunate to have been granted approval for volunteers to be in the Gardens this summer! We have limited availability for volunteers, as well as limited staff working this summer. We only have six students this year, as opposed to our typical 15 students we have during the summer. Your help is essential to getting caught up in the gardens - we are depending on you! While we are ecstatic about this, there are some rules we all need to follow.

- Volunteers must sign up for a shift ahead of time so we can stay within our approved limits (see my contact information below to get on our volunteer list-serve).
- Only three volunteers per day, Monday through Friday, from 9am to noon. **YOU MAY ONLY SHOW UP FOR FOR THE TIME SLOT YOU SIGNED UP FOR.** If you do show up expecting to work outside of your time slot, we will unfortunately have to turn you away!
- Only sign up for one shift per two week period. We want to make sure those who want to volunteer have a chance to get a shift.
- Please only sign up if you know you can make it on time and work the full three hour shift.
- While we will have sanitized tools and buckets available for you to use, we encourage you to bring in your own tools.
- You will **NOT HAVE ACCESS TO THE INSIDE OF THE BUILDING**, so be sure to bring in adequate amounts of water.
- We will not be partaking in our normal snack break, so please bring in your own snacks.
- There is a bathroom available - we will direct you as needed.
- A mask is required to be on you at all times, however not required to be worn while working outdoors.
- Social distancing measures are still in place - maintain a minimum 6 foot distance while volunteering.

This is for your safety and security. Thank you for understanding!

For any questions regarding volunteer opportunities or to get on our volunteer list-serve, contact Bethany Troy at [troybeth@msu.edu](mailto:troybeth@msu.edu).

# WILBIR

## A HISTORY LESSON



Wilbir has been an annual feature in the Gardens since the late 1980's. He was the idea of Dr. Wil Carlson, the first Director of the Gardens. Wilbir stands 14 feet tall when assembled. There are 3 cubic yards of soil surrounding an inner core of packing peanuts and empty potting mix bags (to lighten him down a bit). To make him beautiful, he is covered with around 2300 Begonias with nearly as many to form his tail. Through the years, Wilbir has appeared as Big Bird and a pink flamingo as well! Every winter, Wilbir is disassembled and stripped of his stuffing and burlap skin and waits for spring.

Wilbir has moved around the Gardens but has found his forever home near the Garden entrance where he will greet each and every visitor through the summer .



# GARDEN CRITTERS

BY AMY MCCAUSEY, WEDDING & EVENT COORDINATOR

We are so thankful to work in a beautiful place that allows us to experience nature at it's finest. Below are a few critters we have found while working in the Gardens this spring.



Who knew.....  
chipmunks can  
climb trees!





# ADVENTURES IN WATER GARDENING

BY BETHANY TROY, PERENNIAL GARDEN MANAGER

Since I was a child, I have always been fascinated by gardens with accompanying water features. While growing up in Flower Mound, Texas, my mother heavily gardened around our pool, creating a paradise in our own backyard. I fondly remember running around in my bare feet, looking at the insects living on the plants between my daily swims. Then, she sold our house to move to Michigan,



where lakes replaced pools and gardens heavily died back in winter time. Who knew that eventually I would find myself managing a perennial garden, complete with a pond that needed some extra love and care. I don't know about you – but something about maintaining a pond that I didn't create myself gives me a little bit of anxiety. Am I going to kill the plants or the fish? What kind of designs can I do to make this more interesting? There's a whole little ecosystem going on beneath the water that we don't come in contact with regularly. So what do I do? Do I have to stick to plants that are common in water gardens, or can I surround the pond with a different, eclectic style of plantings? I'm going to talk about some minimal maintenance and care, and then focus more on design and the transformation around the pond, as that is the most enjoyable part!

In the spring, we start with a nice raking of the interior to remove matter that doesn't quickly decay – things like large twigs/branches, oak leaves, and mulch accumulate during storms and throughout the winter. We will even find fun things like sunglasses, miniature figurines, and kids' shoes (no children have been found in the pond – don't worry!). We also remove weeds that may have settled in over time. Then, we use barley packets in the pond. These sink to the bottom of the pond and start the process of eliminating unwanted algae. I appreciate the barley packets as opposed to straw or concentrate, as they are more discreet and I don't have to do as much math. After the barley packets, I will throw a small amount of black-dye concentrate into the pond (natural, environmentally friendly) to help minimize exposure from the sun, as algae would grow back much more quickly without this additive.



Then comes the design. Two years ago, my students and I removed large old willows, grey dogwood, and other shrubs as we really wanted to make the corner of the garden pop with color and more interest. Since, we have planted a specialty conifer, *Pinus densiflora* 'Burke's Red Variegated'. This little guy has been the talk of the town since he was planted. We also planted a Japanese

maple, *Acer palmatum* 'Orangeola'. We felt the contrast of the foliage near the variegated pine would work well – and it has! Afterwards, we started to add some groundcover between the flagstones. We added *Mazus reptans*, a purple flowering, water-loving plant that spreads quickly enough to fill, yet not become a nuisance. To add more interesting color and textures, we have planted a mixture of hardy, groundcover succulents, and a few flame willows, *Salix* 'Flame', to provide winter color and interest. We even added a beautiful hypertufa Japanese lantern to the mix for some architectural aesthetics! If you have a pond at home or you maintain one in your spare time, I encourage you to get creative! Color, texture, and funky style around a water feature can really help to make it pop, even if these mixes are a little non-traditional.

Now comes designing within the pond. We already have existing water lilies in pots, which we fertilize with water lily pellets every year to keep them blooming. My students and I attempted to transplant a lotus into the pond as well. As tough as that adventure was, we are crossing our fingers that our transplant worked! Only time will tell. Additionally, we have added a few mixed containers with elephant ears,



Juncus, and cannas. These are to provide some additional texture, and more importantly, a vertical element within the water to allow for a dynamic design. We have also added six mixed perennial containers around the pond to bring more color and design ideas to the garden. What fun we have here in the perennial garden!

Make sure you make your way over to our beautiful perennial pond to see what additional changes we make throughout the year, and to get inspiration for your very own gardens at home.

# GARDENS' STAFF HOME GARDENS

BY AMY MCCAUSEY, WEDDING & EVENT COORDINATOR

While we all work hard to keep the MSU Horticulture Gardens beautiful, we wanted to share some of our home gardens with you as well.

## Daedre



Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari*) are a plant from my childhood and I'm happy to share them with my daughter. When I bought my first house in Lansing about 11 years ago, I brought some bulbs from my parent's house.



This is my first gardening season with an active toddler, so some changes were in order. This spring, I removed all the thorny barberry (*Berberis*) around the perimeter of my garden (originally planted in an attempt to thwart rabbits) and replaced them with lavender.



*Allium* and *Crambe maritima*. Behind them is a Arborvitae hedge I planted for privacy. I only had to replace the middle shrub twice, before I got one that survived! Random note: I have an odd preponderance of praying mantids in my garden and often find their egg cases (called ootheca!) attached to the Arborvitae.



Left: My little garden gnome sitting on a path between Panicum 'Shenandoah' and my rhubarb patch. The rest of my garden is basically filled with whatever perennials Bethany recommends to me. I have an entire rock garden on the side of my house that is filled with hardy succulents and other drought-tolerant plants that Bethany has produced over the years.

Right: The main focus of my garden this year is to include as many colors as possible. My daughter turns two in July and she is in the thick of learning her colors. We love to point to different flowers and ask her what color they are. I also planted cherry tomatoes and cucumbers, which she loves to eat.



# Amy



The most recent landscaping done around the barn we built last fall.



I finally finished the landscaping around the house following a home remodel a few summers back.



# Bethany



Jessica



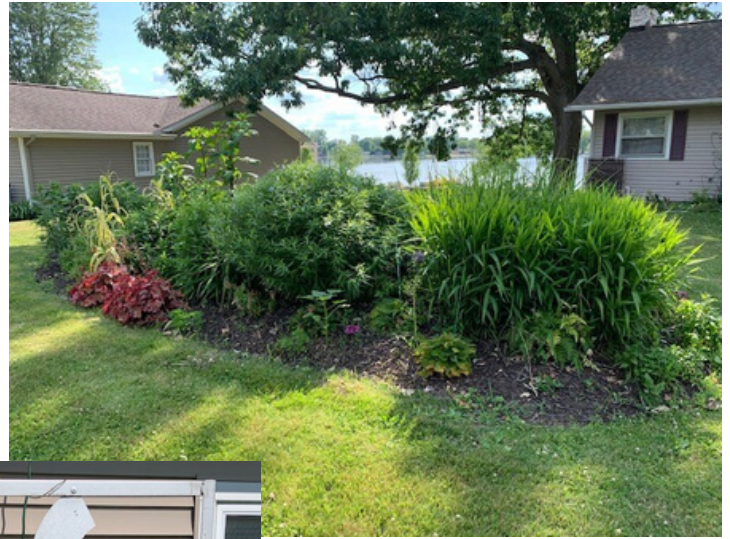
Peaches on our peach tree



One of my favorite plant combinations in my perennial bed



Lakeside landscape that was installed two years ago



Perennial bed with some of the wonderful plants Bethany has grown over the years



Honeysuckle trellis

Kristin



My favorite part of my landscape is my two small woodland gardens, the more established one shown here.



# ASK THE EXPERT

Salvaged from the now defunct Michigan Gardening Magazine, join us throughout 2020 for Daedre's final Ask The Expert questions!

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BY DAEDRE MCGRATH  
TRIAL GARDEN MANAGER

## Canna Virus

**Question:** I've been overwintering my Canna lily tubers for several years now by storing them in a dark coat closet. In my garden last year, the leaves look all streaky and diseased. Did I do something wrong?

- Beth A. from Troy

**Answer:** Sounds like you are observing the symptoms of one or more pathogens in the Canna virus group. The Canna genus is susceptible to several different viruses that can cause a variety of symptoms including mottled or streaky foliage, as well as distorted or stunted growth of both foliage and flowers. It can be difficult to identify the virus on some of the showier, variegated foliage types. Some of the viruses are spread from plant to plant by aphids, while others are thought to be spread mechanically by contaminated garden tools or from the division of infected tubers. Since the damage is caused by a virus, there are no pesticides that can treat the infection (much like how a human virus cannot be treated with an antibiotic). Infected plants should be disposed of, preferably in the garbage rather than in your compost pile. I have experienced Canna virus in my own garden and it is really disappointing when it happens. Luckily, plant breeders have been introducing more and more seed-propagated Canna varieties in the last few years. Instead of overwintering potentially infected tubers from one year to the next, Cannas can be quickly and easily grown from virus-free seed each year. If you want to continue growing Cannas from tubers, just be sure to purchase healthy looking plants from a reputable source. Be sure your plants still appear virus-free at the end of the season before digging up the tubers for storage.



Photos above: Streaky foliage in Canna is often an indication of Canna virus.