

Owen County Garden Club Spring 2020



A Note from Julie . . .

I hope that this newsletter finds you well. And there is nothing more important than that.

My goal with this newsletter is to entertain, enlighten, and/or otherwise distract you from pressing cares for at least a little while. Let's think about the fact that we are lucky. Lucky to be gardeners. Lucky to have most or all of our daily obligations slacken right now when there are so many tasks that we can do outdoors. Lucky that Mother Nature is working in our favor—a little more warmth each week, even if mixed with a little rain. Lucky that we can each carry on at home (as well as we can) and that we don't *depend* on being together to pursue our hobby.

Even though we cannot be together, *use this group* as a network, whether it's a porch delivery of a plant start or a grocery pick-up. Many of us know our neighbors or have local family, but if you don't, *use this group*. If you need something, reach out, and we will find a way to help in a way that is safe for everyone.

Ah, I see the sun has come out . . . and so I will excuse myself to head outdoors. Seldom has gardening therapy been so needed. I hope that you can all benefit from your own doses of therapy in your own yards.



Something's Cooking at the Extension Office!

Many of you are aware that we for many years have tried to enhance the front of the Purdue Extension office on Washington Street. We've amended the soil, put in plants, put in other plants, added a rain barrel, replaced the rain barrel and its hose, and . . . well, we tried. It's a challenging spot because the roof overhang is quite deep, and the first foot or two of garden space gets wet, and the back part just stays dry, dry, dry.

But, change is afoot. Jennifer Abrell (Extension Educator), Chelsea Brewer (Community Wellness Coordinator), and a 4-H parent, Amber Curtis, are pulling together a special-interest group of 4-Hers who will take over that garden space in front of the office so that students can grow vegetables there and use their produce as Fair entries.

Purdue Extension's current policy is that all face-to-face meetings or gatherings are suspended until at least the end of May. So, they are working on ways to convey information and to allow this project to get started in spite of social distancing.

How does this affect the Garden Club?

- First of all, Floyd Richards's rain barrel will be properly installed, with a proper low-flow hose, and really put to use. Hooray.
- Second, I have given Amber permission to name the Garden Club as a "community partner" as she applies for a grant (to help pay for some new border material, soil, mulch, etc.).
- Third, they will install a small, secure storage space of some sort for some basic tools. I have told Amber that I thought the Club could help by providing tools. Perhaps several trowels (with different types of grips to accommodate the different ages of kids—anywhere from 3rd to 12th grade) and a couple of claw-type tools (to get at weeds). *Please weigh in. Do you approve or disapprove of the Club spending no more than \$100 on about half a dozen decent-quality hand tools?* Shoot me a call or email!

Amber is very motivated to make this work, and it could be a first step toward a larger, 4-H and/or community garden. More power to her, 4-H kids, and the Extension Office!

Gardening and Shopping in the Time of Coronavirus

Just so everyone is aware: Our two local nurseries are open for business. Shop at your own discretion.



315 Bush Road (up 231, north of “the Junction”); 10 A.M. to 6 P.M.,
7 days a week (but closed on Easter Sunday). Reach them at 812-829-2493.

In a statement I’ve pulled from Facebook, here is what they are saying:

We are practicing the recommended social distancing. We do have a limited supply of gloves upon request and are disinfecting the common areas frequently. Just like going to a grocery store or doctor office, bring your mask if you need. We do realize nearly all gardeners want to pick out what they purchase. So we will do everything we can to make that as safe as possible.



1961 State Hwy. 67; taking orders (and payment) online and by phone and then setting items out for pick-up. So, no public access to greenhouses. See the ever-growing inventory online. Go to Harrimanfarms.com and/or call 812-879-4623.

Here’s what Shelley Harriman says:

I’d really encourage using the online store since that way you can see photos of what we have available. Right now there are many plants, seeds, and items already listed, but I’ll be adding more and more over the next few days and weeks until all our inventory is online. Once we have an order in hand, we gather the plants,... mark the order with your name, and place it on the green benches on the front porch.

NOTE: Pick up orders Monday–Saturday any time after 10 A.M. Closed Sundays.

Perennial Plant Association’s 2020 Perennial Plant of the Year: *Aralia Cordata* ‘Sun King’



Common names: spikenard, herbal aralia, Japanese spikenard, mountain asparagus

Characteristics: upright herbaceous perennial

Habitat: part to full shade; prefers moisture; tolerates more sun if it has adequate water; prefers soil pH of 5.0–7.5

Height: 6–10 feet

Native to: Japan, Korea, eastern China; imported to the United States in early 1900s

Uses: spring shoots are blanched and eaten as a vegetable (thus the “asparagus” label); dried roots traditionally used medicinally in Korea to treat inflammation, fever, and pain; tiny drupes (fruits) may be toxic to humans

Though I am disappointed to have a non-North American plant getting this attention, this is an interesting plant, and I see no evidence of complaints about it becoming invasive or out-competing natives. My sources say that the summer flowers (“loose umbels of white flowers”) are attractive to bees and flies. I can’t confirm whether that applies only to its native Japanese and Korean bugs or whether it benefits North American pollinators as well.

The chartreuse coloring of the leaves is steady from spring all the way through the season, which helps it stand out in its preferred shady setting. The plant does die all the way back in winter, but the roots are generally freeze hardy.



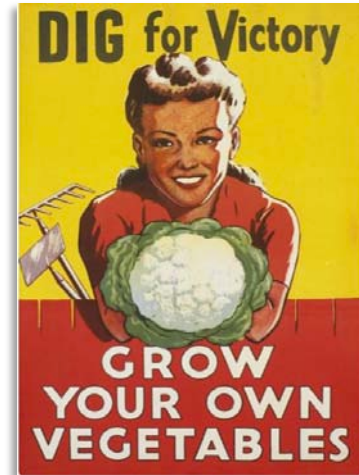
Signs of the Times?



America, WWII



Britain, WWII



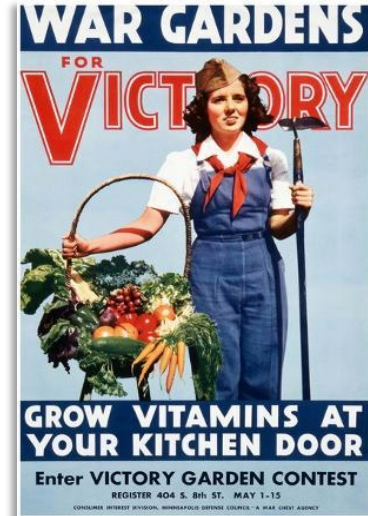
America, WWII



Britain, WWII



America, WWII



America, WWII

Most of us recognize these images as “retro” images. They are widely available, these days, as posters that people use as décor in kitchens or on porches. Of course, in the early 1900s, they were neither art nor décor. They were dead serious messages issued from the government to the public. And it wasn’t just in the United States. The United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Germany all had campaigns similar to the U.S. “victory garden” campaign during one or both of the world wars.

Though Canada seems to have led the way with its “A Vegetable Garden for Every Home” campaign, America soon went big with the idea in 1917. Charles Lathrop Pack, identified in my encyclopedia entry only as “a businessman and philanthropist,” organized the U.S. National War Garden Commission and led the way.

The root of the campaign was simple: Everyone can help a little bit, and together, we will do a lot. Think about it. In a world of “total war,” absolutely everything was disrupted: food growing, food harvesting, food processing, food delivery, all labor, all transportation. In addition, there were huge populations of people (the soldiers) concentrated in areas that suddenly needed new supply chains. The logistics of it are mind-boggling. So it made complete sense for the people at home, still clinging to whatever normality remained, to pitch in and grow at least some of their own food so as not to impede the war effort. In addition to providing the obvious—food for people to eat during a time of rationing and shortages, victory gardens were also a morale booster. They gave people a sense of empowerment.

Though the victory garden movement was a major home-front initiative during WWII, it had firmly established itself during WWI. Then, just after WWI, a man named James H. Burdett perceived, in the wake of the earliest victory garden efforts, that there was a need for basic instruction in backyard gardening. Burdett had formerly worked as a newspaper journalist and also as the advertising manager for a seed company, so he had some gardening know-how and he also understood mass communication. He embarked on a mass education effort to make the everyday backyard gardener more productive. This effort marked the birth of the non-profit National Garden Bureau (NGB) in 1920.

This year, the NGB is celebrating its 100th birthday. In its own words, the organization's mission is as follows:

"Inspire. Connect. Grow." National Garden Bureau is a non-profit organization that exists to educate, inspire, and motivate people to increase the use of plants in homes, gardens, and workplaces by being the marketing arm of the gardening industry. Our members are experts in the field of horticulture and our information comes directly from these sources.

According to NGB's own website (NGB.org), the organization "came of age" during WWII and played an important role in encouraging home gardeners and giving them the information they needed to plant, harvest, and preserve food successfully. A book by the founder, James Burdett, published in 1943, was considered the quintessential source, though certainly not the *only* source, of gardening know-how.

Alarming, it seems as if this is all very timely. I have heard from several sources that there has been a huge demand for seeds and vegetable plants at garden centers and online. Let's hope that these droves of growers know what they're doing and that their plants yield bountifully. And perhaps what they feel they need to do now out of necessity will become a habit. There isn't anyone who wouldn't benefit from both working in the garden *and* from having fresh produce to eat.

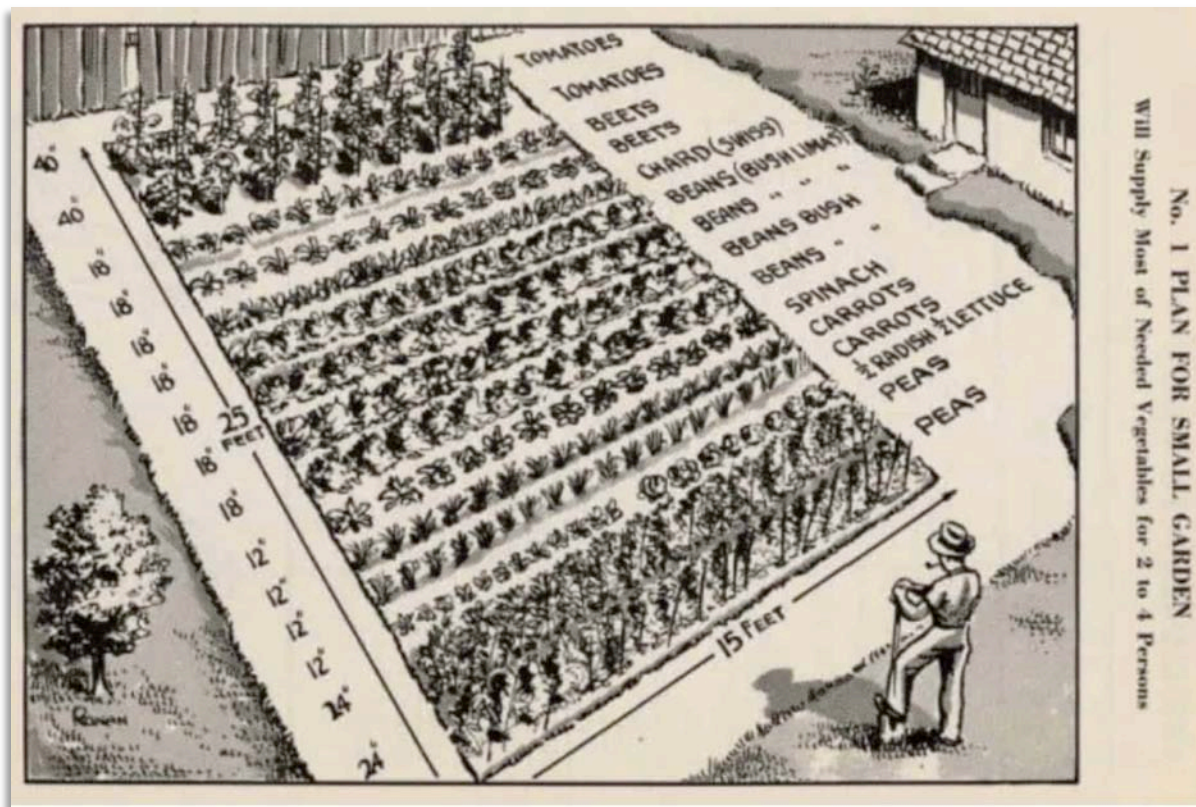
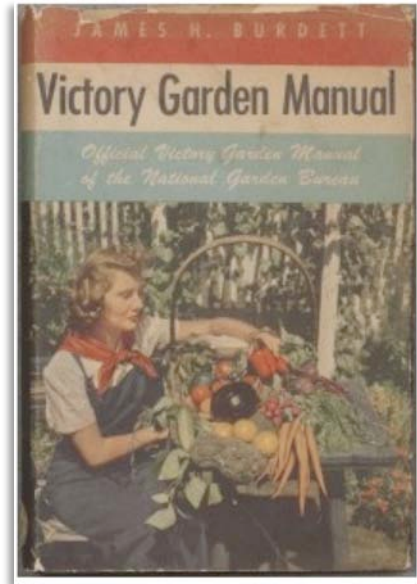


Image Source: *ABC of Victory Gardens: Backyard Farming Made Easy for All*, published 1943 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture; accessed online 6 April 2020, ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/37.

National Garden Bureau's 2020 Plants of the Year

The Perennial Plant Association isn't the only organization that runs a "beauty contest," as it were. Following are the NGB's plant picks of the year.

Annual: Lantana

Names: *Lantana camara* grows upright; *Lantana montevidensis* is a trailing variety

Common names: might be called wild sage, flowered sage, shrub verbena

Habitat: Prefers full sun but can tolerate partial shade; prefers lighter soils and does *not* like to be wet or overwatered

Height: up to 4 feet for the upright variety; 1–2 feet for the trailing variety

Native to: Tropics

This long-blooming plant comes in a terrific variety of colors, thanks largely to the popularity of lantana in Europe in the 1700s. Lots of well-to-do folks with greenhouses were breeding and cross-breeding it. In our zone, it is treated as an annual. The site davesgarden.com includes many comments from people who pot up cuttings in roughly October and treat it as a houseplant, resulting in a blooming plant by April. NGB states that lantana blossoms are "butterfly heaven"—attractive to and beneficial for many of our North American pollinators, including hummingbirds. However, the plant has been designated as invasive in Florida and Hawaii, and in many parts of the world, it is a "major weed," as described in the Global Invasive Species Database, which has nothing good to say about it.

Other tips: Deer and rabbits do not nibble; the leaves have a disagreeable odor. If it gets leggy, prune it back severely and it'll regrow and bloom within a season. Deadheading keeps the blooming plant looking tidy, but doesn't necessarily spur it to make more blossoms.

NOTE: All parts of plant are toxic to humans and household pets.

Native alternative: For a plant with a similar growing habit (though more limited color choices), try rose verbena (*Glandularia canadensis*) (aka "vervain") It's native to the eastern and south-central United States.



Perennial: Lavender

Names: English lavender (*Lavender angustifolia*) [other varieties, such as Spanish (*L. stoechas*) and French (*L. dentata*) are viable only in zone 8 and farther south]; lavender is part of the mint family.

Habitat: Prefers full sun and well-drained soil. Does not like wet roots. Wants circulation, and does not thrive in humid climates. Prefers alkaline soil (so pH of 7.0 or greater).

Height: Most cultivars that are generally available to us are dwarf varieties, topping out at 2 feet, give or take.

Native to: Mediterranean (in spite of the label "English"—it doesn't come from there)

Can't you just see that iconic image of a lavender field, fat rows of it stretching to the horizon? But alas, we are not in Provence, France. Nor do we have Provence's climate. Both our clay and our summer humidity make growing lavender a challenge. Not impossible, but a challenge. One would have to establish a bed with some sandy soil. And instead of mulch, the recommendation is to use stone. Mulch retains moisture, which for lavender just encourages root rot.



The website uslavender.org suggests, for determined North American lavender fans, planting several different varieties in various places on your property. Then you can see which ones best tolerate your soil and climate. There are roughly 450 varieties to choose from, so . . . good luck!

While you are experimenting, you can also decide which varieties are best for culinary uses, which for drying, which for crafting. So many choices.

Native alternative: Salvia! Many types are native to North America. You get long-blooming blue flowers. You get happy pollinators. Win-win.

Bulb Crop: Iris



Tall bearded iris

Name trivia: *Iris* is actually the Greek word for “rainbow.” And indeed, does any other flower offer the color variety that irises do?

Types: The American Iris Society (AIS) identifies three main types: bearded, beardless, and Dutch. Within those three types, though, they name 15 different iris “groups” that include tall and dwarf types, etc.

Habitat: in our gardens; wants at least half a day of full sun, and does not want to be wet; soil pH from 6.1–7.2

Height: 1 foot for dwarf varieties; 3 feet for tall bearded, Siberian, etc.

Native to: temperate zones in northern hemisphere, from Europe to Asia to North America

Just to be clear, I am using NGB’s label—“bulb” crop. A bulb is a “rounded underground storage organ” for a plant that lies dormant in winter. And as it turns out, some irises DO grow from a bulb. Dutch

iris, for example. But the bearded irises with which we are most familiar grow from a rhizome: “a continuously growing horizontal underground stem that puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals.” And then, Siberian, Louisiana, and Japanese iris grow from roots. *Who knew?*

Why do we plant iris rhizomes at or close to the surface? No, it’s not because they need to be exposed to the sun. It’s because they don’t want to be wet. And in truth, according to an AIS blog article, as long as they doesn’t sit and soak, iris *will* thrive if planted 1 or 2 inches below the surface.

Why do we cut iris leaves back in the autumn? Because our mothers and grandmothers did. Is it necessary? Again, according to the AIS—no. It doesn’t really hurt the plant, but it doesn’t do it any good, either. Any leaves that stay green are doing the photosynthesis thing and, therefore, storing food for next season. So, tidy away the dead leaves, if you feel compelled, but there is no need to cut the fans back.

Do I need to dig them up? Yes, after some number of years, your iris may seem a little tired or they may seem crowded. Then it’s time to dig. Cut off and save the “babies” on the rhizomes and discard the oldest part, along with any parts that feel soft or mushy. *Now* is the time to trim that fan back to help these transplants get up and running again. Now is also the time to call your friends, because you will have lots of babies to share.

Are iris good for our pollinators? You bet! Think of bearded iris as a fancy restaurant. There is a nice landing place (the “falls”—the petals that lay themselves open). There is a fancy and very available smorgasbord (the pollen-filled “beard” at the base of the falls). And then there is all that fancy stuff overhead (the “standard”—the petals that stand up straight), which actually provide some protection from insect-eating birds that could be looking for a snack.

And there are irises for every season. Here, various iris types, in order of bloom time:

Bloom Time	Iris Type
• late winter/very early spring	dwarf bulbous
• early to midspring	dwarf bearded
• midspring and then again in late summer to early fall	reblooming bearded
• mid to late spring and into early summer	tall bearded
• late spring to early summer	Siberian and Dutch
• early summer	Japanese
• early to midsummer	Louisiana

Natives: Visit this U.S. Forest Service site for the specific types of iris that are native to North America: fs.fed.us/wildflowers/beauty/iris



Siberian iris has narrower, taller foliage than bearded iris, and tends to grow in a clump. This is *Iris sibirica* ‘Chilled Wine.’



Japanese iris display at least as much variety in color and petal style as tall bearded iris do. This is *Iris ensata* ‘Japanese Silk.’

Gardening Tips for Everyone Webinar Series

April 9
Getting Started
With Your Garden

April 30
The 4-1-1 on Warm
Season Crops

April 16
A Glance at
Pest Management

May 7
Gardening for
Pollinators

April 23
Tips for Spring
Crops

May 14
Disease Scouting &
Control



Featuring 6 dynamic sessions presented by Purdue Extension Ag & Natural Resource Educators. "Gardening Tips for Everyone Webinar Series" will help you grow veggies and experience nature through the science and art of gardening.

All Sessions Offered
1:00 – 2:00 PM EST
From Your Home
No Cost to Participate

Register 2 days prior
to webinar.

Register online at:
<https://tinyurl.com/garden4everyone>



For more information, please contact Purdue Extension - Putnam County at smith535@purdue.edu or 765-653-8411. Purdue University is an equal opportunity/equal access/affirmative action institution.

Owen County Garden Club Officers for 2019–2020:

Julie Coffin, President
812-829-2493
julie_coffin@att.net

Karen Crosby, Secretary
812-829-5681
karen.crosby@hylant.com

Angie Fender, Vice-President
812-829-2679
lewisfender9@gmail.com

Ann Henk, Treasurer
812-714-6010
ahenk47@gmail.com

Visit us on the Web at <http://birdsbybent.com/gardenclub> or
"Like" the Owen County Garden Club on Facebook.