

Owen County Garden Club Newsletter

Winter 2011 - 2012

Editor- Annie Bright 986-3335

Happy Holidays



Christmas Celebration Dec. 3, 2011

You can join the fun as Club members participate in the celebration to welcome Santa at the Courthouse on Dec. 3rd.

Several organizations and people have been working for months to plan an evening of activities to delight all ages. Downtown Spencer will be buzzing with a parade, story telling, food, cookie decorating, music and other activities.

Following the parade at 5 p.m. Club members will invite children to fill bags with pot pourri, decorate gift tags and tie their creations up with ribbon. Each child will take home their hand-made gift for someone special.

Many thanks to the elves who helped with this project: Faye Ure, Annie Bright, Nancy Knapp, Millie Ranard,

Elizabeth Blake and Karen Crosby for stitching up the bags and Cathy Chamberlein who with the help of her exchange students created the tags.

We still need markers and stickers for decorating the tags. If you have anything to donate or want to assist the children during the event, please call Annie Bright at 986-3335 or email brightside66@gmail.com.

We need elves to work 2 ½ hour shifts from 4-6:30 and 6:30-9 pm.

Minutes from October 3, 2011 Meeting

Thirty-three members gathered for the Garden Club's annual cookout and auction at the old nature center at McCormick's Creek State Park.

Julie Coffin summed up the Garden Club's year by briefly relating our 2011 events: the "January" meeting in February at the Lion's Club (due to numerous weather-related postponements), the March educational meeting on flower arranging, the June meeting at the Fender home, and the sports-oriented County Fair display in July.

Angie Fender also offered feedback on the August trip to the quilt gardens in northern Indiana and declared it a fun and successful event.

Nancy Knapp reported that the Club's checking account holds \$1,852.29. She also indicated that a number of members have not paid their \$5 dues this year, and that some members have not paid for several years. Contact Nancy K. to check your status.

Agenda items were as follows:

Pots/Urns: Angie Fender will once again be in charge of coordinating the holiday decorating efforts. She indicated that "donations" of greens (pine, holly, cedar, etc) are welcome. Saturday, November 19, was set as the day for decorating the pots.

John Fuhs volunteered to take the old summer plants out of the pots on November 5 or 12. Nancy Knapp and Faye will take care of buying new potting soil and filling pots in time for the November 19 activities.

Faye Ure raised a question about how we handle the pots next summer, which is an ongoing issue as we struggle to coordinate the efforts of pot "owners" who water their own, volunteers who water certain pots on certain days, and other volunteers who fill in the gaps. One suggestion was to have each pot "owner" take care of his or her own pot, or perhaps to buddy up with another member and share duties. Another suggestion was to try to get nearby businesses more involved. All agreed that the issue bears more discussion.

Christmas Parade: Barb Winders announced that various Spencer organizations are once again planning a Christmas Parade on the Courthouse Square on December 3. They are asking for volunteers to add to the festivities by providing food or activities for children and families. Annie Bright volunteered to be the club's representative at a planning meeting to be held on October 12 or 13 at the Lion's Club. Nancy Knapp and Joe O'Connor volunteered to help Annie with whatever ideas spring from the meeting.

MCSP Event: Al Tinsley made members aware of an event to be held on October 11 by the Friends of McCormick's Creek State Park. A cookout and pitch-in at 6 p.m. will be followed by a presentation by Vicki Bastin on the history of Indiana's state parks.

Next Meeting: The January meeting, hosted by Angie Fender, was set for Monday, January 9.

Submitted by: Julie Coffin, Secretary

Tips for Feeding Birds

Using different kinds of feeders and foods reduces waste and attracts a variety of birds. Woodpeckers, jays, nuthatches, chickadees, and finches feed in trees and prefer their lunches served at high levels. Cardinals, towhees, sparrows, and juncos usually feed near or on the ground. A table feeder works well for them. Place feeders where they are visible from a window so that you can enjoy the action. To avoid crashes, don't put your feeders near large windows that may result in collisions.

If you are going to put out just one bird feeder, a tube feeder for sunflower seed is the best choice. Be sure to select a model with metal ports around the seed dispensers to protect the feeder from nibbling squirrels. Hang the feeder at least five feet off the ground. These feeders are especially attractive to small birds such as chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, goldfinches, siskins, and purple and house finches.

Suet is a good thing to feed titmice, chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers. In addition to the regular suet-feeder visitors, wrens, and warblers occasionally pick at these mixes. You can hang suet chunks from a tree in an onion bag or a half-inch hardware-cloth basket, or in a cage feeder. You can also make your own suet pudding. Suet puddings are made by grinding and melting suet and adding seeds. Form into balls when cool and put in net bags.

A great family activity is making snacks for the birds by packing peanut butter-cornmeal-seed blends into large pine cones or forming it into balls. I save the plastic packaging from the seed cakes I buy to use as molds for my homemade cakes. Peanut butter-cornmeal mixes (one part peanut butter, four parts cornmeal, and one part vegetable shortening) is good for winter feeding. Mixing the peanut butter with cornmeal stretches the peanut butter and makes this sticky treat easier to swallow. Hang the pine cones from a tree branch, or from a wire stretched between trees. Keep a field guide handy so you and the children can identify the birds that come to dine. The computer is a great tool for identifying birds too.

Here is a brief summary of commonly used bird seeds. Black-oil seed is the preferred seed of many small birds. Striped sunflower seed is also readily eaten, especially by large-beaked birds. White millet is the favorite food of most small-beaked ground-feeding birds; they will also eat red millet, which is in many seed combinations. Millet attracts quail, doves, juncos, sparrows, towhees, cowbirds, and red-winged blackbirds. Medium cracked corn is about as popular with ground-feeding birds as millet, but it is vulnerable to rot. Feed small amounts, mixed with millet, on feeding tables or from watertight feeders. Avoid fine cracked corn, since it quickly turns to mush; coarse cracked corn is too large for small-beaked birds. Cracked corn attracts quail, doves, crows, jays, sparrows, juncos, and towhees. Milo, wheat, or oats are frequently mixed into low-priced birdseed blends. Most birds discard them in favor of other food, which makes a mess under the feeders. Thistle (a.k.a. niger) is the preferred food of American goldfinches, lesser goldfinches, house finches, and common redpolls. Niger is sometimes called "black gold," because it costs so much. Niger works best in special thistle-seed feeders with small holes that restrict the flow of the tiny black seeds.

Diseases such as salmonella can spread at feeders, especially where seeds and droppings mix. Ground-feeding birds are especially vulnerable. To reduce the risk of disease, clean your feeders occasionally with a 10 percent bleach solution—one part bleach to nine parts water. I also rake under the feeders to keep the mess down. Keeping squirrels out of feeders isn't easy. Avoid hanging feeders from your eaves and if you hang them in trees, don't hang them near the trunk of the tree. For best results place them on isolated poles at least five feet off the ground and away from your house and nearby trees and shrubs, keeping in mind that squirrels can leap as far as six feet. Attach to the feeder pole either an inverted cone with at least a 13-inch diameter or a special squirrel-detering dish. Protect feeders suspended from a horizontal wire by threading compact discs, or plastic soda bottles on the wire on each side.

Experts agree that feeding birds is not as helpful as improving backyard habitat through landscaping, which provides food for a wider variety of birds, as well as shelter and nesting places. Utilizing native plants and shrub will encourage wildlife to make their home in your yard. Offering a banquet for our feathered friends provides hours of entertainment during winter and gives them the boost they need when ice and snow covers the landscape.

Annie

Winter Blooms

On a recent trip to the big home improvement store with a friend, I passed by a display of enticing boxes. Each colorful box contained one amaryllis bulb. Some of the boxes were opened at the top as the hardy plants burst out of their dark boxes to find light. How they grow with out water, soil or light is a miracle.

Naturally, I had to bring a box home with me. It already has a few green blades and a bud. In a few weeks, we will be enjoying the beauty of this tropical plant. I bought my first amaryllis bulbs fifty years ago. They were a Christmas gift for my Mother. She was thrilled with the blooms, which were almost as big as dinner plates. Of course, those bulbs died long ago. They have been replaced many times, as the beauty of a crown of blooms atop the slender stem of an amaryllis is a tradition at our house.

Properly treated, an amaryllis bulb will last for years. An amaryllis will sprout and grow very quickly. Their blooms rival the beauty of orchids and come in many colors and styles. They aren't expensive now. The one I bought this week actually cost less than the ones I bought fifty years ago. Directions come on the box. All you need is some potting soil, a pot and a little patience.

Another way to bring a touch of springtime to your home in winter is to grow a pot of paper white narcissus. Forcing them to bloom in mid-winter is not difficult. Paper whites do not even need soil. Line a shallow bowl or planter with a layer of small rocks, set the bulbs in the rocks, add more rocks, but leave the tops of the bulbs uncovered, add water. Set the bowl in a warm, sunny place, water occasionally. In a short time the green blades will sprout. In about 4 weeks you will be rewarded with delicate white blooms. When the flowers fade, cut off all greenery. Bulbs can be saved for next year or planted in the garden.

Have a Joyful Thanksgiving



“For flowers that bloom about our feet;
For tender grass, so fresh, so sweet;
For song of bird, and hum of bee,
For all things fair we hear or see,
Father in heaven, we thank Thee!”

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Deck the Halls !

Help Decorate the Urns on Nov. 19.

Angie Fender and Emily Redenbarger will lead the merry brigade of workers on Nov. 19 to spread holiday cheer around the Courthouse Square, just in time for Thanksgiving.

They have collected bags of greenery to use for the project. Many thanks to the generosity of new Club member Dora Atkins for her contribution of greenery to our annual project. Volunteers are asked to meet at 1 o'clock on the Courthouse Square on Nov. 19th. Bring your clippers, and any greenery/decorations you have to add to the arrangements in the urns.

Putting the Triangle to Bed

It's time to cut back the roses and otherwise clear out the Triangle. Let's meet on Saturday, November 19, at 10 a.m. Then the people who are helping with the urns can break for lunch and go on to urn-decorating. Call Julie Coffin at 829-2493 with questions.

Many thanks to John and Nancy Fuhs for cleaning the old plants out of the urns and getting them ready to be decorated for the holidays.



CRANBERRIES

Cranberries are a uniquely American food. Native Americans mixed them with venison and fat to make pemmican. Pilgrims ate them with maple syrup. The blossom of the cranberry resembles a sand crane's profile, hence the term crane berry. Here is an interesting alternative to cranberry sauce or relish.

Cranberry Soup

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| 1 12 oz. bag fresh cranberries | 2 allspice berries | 1 T. cornstarch |
| 1 ¼ c. sugar | 2 whole cloves | ¼ c. heavy cream |
| 2 cinnamon sticks | 4 black peppercorns | ¾ c. dry red wine (or cranberry juice) |

Combine 3 cups of water, the sugar and the spices in a large saucepan, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and add the cranberries. Simmer the soup for 30 minutes. You might want to add more sugar.

Mix the cornstarch with 2 T. cold water to make a paste. Whisk this into the soup and boil for 1 minute. Let the soup cool to room temperature then refrigerate until chilled. Soup may be stored in frig for two days before serving. Just before serving stir in the heavy cream and wine. Serve chilled. You can garnish the soup with a dollop of sour cream or whipped cream.

Owen County Garden Club is part of Purdue Extension Service

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829-5010

Everyone welcome!
You don't need to be a Master Gardener to join.

President:
Faye Ure, 828-0565
Vice Pres.:
Angie Fender, 829-2679
Secretary:
Julie Coffin, 829-2493
Treasurer:
Nancy Knapp, 829-2128

Winter Meeting

The Fenders have agreed to host our January meeting again this year. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate; if it doesn't the re-scheduled date will be posted on the web site. The meeting is scheduled for Monday, January 9 at 6 pm.

The January meeting is always a lot of fun and a busy time. Following the usual pitch-in dinner, we will spend the evening planning events and activities for the coming year.

Bring a tasty dish, a hardy appetite and your ideas and join the group for the evening.

Time to Pay Dues

The Garden Club is a great bargain. Dues are only \$5 a year. They can be paid at the January meeting or mailed to Nancy Knapp at 2741 Pottersville Road, Spencer, IN 47460.

We're on the Web!
See us at:
www.birdsbybent.com/gardenclub