

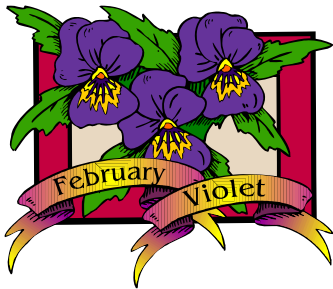
Roots & Shoots



Master Gardener
Society
of Oakland County



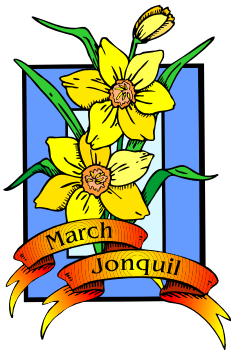
February / March 2010



February 2, 2010 @ 6:30pm
MGSOOC General Society Meeting & Location
Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church
5631 North Adams Rd, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304

Speaker : Gary Eichen –Education: “How to Have a Healthy Lawn”

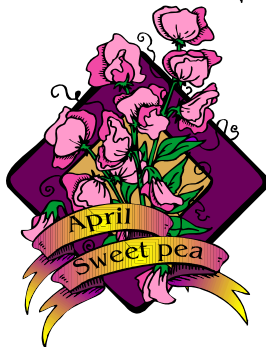
A business meeting will take place, prior to the start of our Educational Program.



March 2, 2010 @ 6:30pm
MGSOOC General Society Meeting & Location
Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church
5631 North Adams Rd, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304

Speaker : Dale White –Education: “Organic Fertilizers and Soil Amendments”

A business meeting will take place, prior to the start of our Educational Program.



April 6, 2010 @ 6:30pm
MGSOOC General Society Meeting & Location
Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church
5631 North Adams Rd, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304

Speaker : Peter Bray–Education: “Peak Oil, Food Supply & Home Gardening”

A business meeting will take place, prior to the start of our Educational Program.

Carol's Corner



It seems like we have been getting more questions on annual re-certification requirements, so I would like to clarify the guidelines for you.

Once a volunteer has achieved their Basic Certification, the annual certification deadline is December 31. **To remain Certified, volunteers need to submit 15 volunteer and 5 educational hours every year.** If a volunteer does not get in the educational or volunteer hours in any given year, those missed hours must be made up the following year. In other words, the missed hours need to be tacked onto the annual 15 volunteer and 5 educational hours. Though you catch yourself up, you still do not certify for the year you missed giving us hours for. After 3 years of inactivity, in order to gain recertification the class must be re-taken.

Each year we return MGSOOC annual membership checks to people because they have not re-certified. **In order to be a MGSOOC member, you must be a currently certified MGVP.** If you do not submit enough hours to our office we cannot forward your Society payment on to the MGSOOC Treasurer. We keep your payments for a number of weeks hoping that your hours will come in, but after a point we send them back to you. **You are still welcome to come to the monthly MGSOOC general meetings, but you are attending as a guest.** If you need further clarification on this, please contact Cathy Morris. Cathy is the Oakland County MGVP data-entry clerk. She is part-time, but if you email or call her, she will get in touch with you the next day she is in. When you send me messages about your hours I forward them on to Cathy.

In the next few weeks we will be mailing the MGVP wallet cards to certified MGVP's. These cards make it convenient for you to show retailers when they are offering discounts to MGVP's. You will not get one of these cards if you do not Re-certify. We do one run of these cards each year.

Please make a sincere effort to get your hours in by the December 31 deadline this year.

Save the Date

The Volunteer Recognition Banquet will be on Thursday, May 27 this year. We are holding it at White Lake Oaks again as we try to keep the location central and the costs down. Committee members are busy working out the details and it should be a fun event, as usual! We will get the e-invitation out in April.

Continuing Education Committee

CEC (Continuing Education Committee) members have put together a nice schedule of classes this year. We have a Growing Vegetables Organically series and a class on Cover Crops in March. In April/May we will run the Garden Design series again. Also in May there will be a Composting class. Look for a Seed Saving class in August, as well as a Native Plants Garden Tour. We will also have our 3rd annual Herb Fest in October.

You'll find class information in future issues of the Oakland Gardener. We have lots of good things to look forward to this year!

Lastly, **please make sure to wear your name badges when you are volunteering this year. MSUE needs this visibility in these uncertain economic times. Thank you for all your continuing support!!**

Membership Bulletin Board

The Master Gardener Society welcomes the following new members to our group. We look forward to Master Gardening with you in the future.

Robert Denver	Susan Newman	John Turchin	Deb MacDonald
Dannielle Marra	Joan Morgan	Mary Nutbourne	Dawn Pickard
Bette Walker			

—Julie Kowalk – Membership Team

The Gardens of Epcot – Scenes in Living Color

Beauty and the Beast, one of the 109 topiaries at Epcot Center in Florida, is more than just a visual treat presented to us by past Society President and last year's Master Gardener of the Year, Tom Hershberger. It's also a metaphor for acres and acres of greenery and the behind-the-scenes gargantuan job of keeping those acres green.

At Epcot Center in Florida's Disneyworld, almost all of the animated film characters created by the Disney empire are brought to life in a gardener's favorite color - - - green! Tom took us on a photo tour of one of the world's most popular vacation spots, highlighting the marvelous use of horticultural material to replicate bigger-than-life models of most of the beloved creatures ever seen on a screen.

Tom captured various views of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and pointed out that not all parts of the statuary are brought to life by greenery. While all of the characters are created using a very fine miniature ivy, with even the eyes fashioned from flowers, it was brought to our attention that the beards of the dwarfs are not. Unfortunately Tom was unable to get close enough to Grumpy, Doc and Happy to determine what media were used on their facial "hair." But there were plenty of other photos to take our minds off that mystery like the ornate garb of Cinderella and her Prince Charming as well as the photosynthesizing cast of the Little Mermaid, just to name a few.

Most gardeners are thrilled to enjoy such a beautiful tour in the frigid winter months when we take a brief sabbatical from the outdoor seasonal ravages. However our minds are not focused so far away from the beastly activities of gardening. Some of the first questions posed to Tom were “how” and “when” does all of this wonderment occur.

Tom explained that you never see workers, other than those personnel who endlessly have to preen the areas to keep them spotless for the guests. All pruning, feeding, and other plant care is accomplished at night after every guest has left. Tom pointed out the banks of spotlights employed by the garden staff who toil after-hours to keep the characters and other topiaries well-groomed. And for every one of them on display, there is an exact duplicate in the nursery ready to take the place of any one of them should the need arise.

When Epcot was built in the 70s as Epcot Center, its theme was The World, depicted by its icon Spaceship Earth, which greets you at the main entrance. Epcot sprawls over 300 acres, which is twice the size of the Magic Kingdom theme park. It is divided into two areas – Future World and World Showcase. The World Showcase is a collective of pavilions highlighting the cuisine and culture of 11 countries, all wrapped around the World Showcase lagoon, where floating gardens decorate the waters. While we didn’t get to Mexico, Norway, Italy, the United States, or Morocco, with Tom as a tour guide we were able to visit scenes of Germany, China, Japan, Canada, England and France. The German Pavilion is home to a miniature countryside featuring a railroad, landscaped with bonsai for scaled-down forests and parks. In the French Pavilion, where perfume is sold (among other treats), there were topiaries of perfume bottles along the Seine. No trip to France would be complete without touring the gardens of Versailles, even when economy-sized. Japan’s and China’s landscapes were peaceful and restful, with bamboo, koi, water and Zen. The Canada Pavilion was dotted with totems and included a replica of the famed Butchart Gardens on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. The United Kingdom Pavilion showcased a lovely rose garden, possibly the Queen’s.

Many of the flora were easily recognizable such as begonias and marigolds, including some that we grow as houseplants or container treats like *Zebrina pendula* ‘Tricolor.’ The array of vines, groundcovers and succulents was warming and exhilarating, especially on a bitter January evening. I could see many MGs occasionally lean forward toward the screen, failing to curb the autonomic habit we have of trying to get a closer look for ID purposes or perhaps to catch a whiff of scent. Gardeners are so easy.

I drove home thinking about all the night work and wondering if I could handle a job down there. I like to do it myself when conditions permit. It’s cooler, sometimes quieter. What keeps me from it are the insects. But I suspect at Disneyworld, the only insect allowed is Jiminy Cricket.

—Submitted by Susan Tatus McLarty

New MGSOC Award Dedicated

The executive board and committee leads have all agreed that the Master Gardener Society of Oakland County needed to recognize its outstanding volunteers. So we determined that a special award would be dedicated and presented annually at the December General Meeting & Potluck.

This award will recognize a society volunteer who has gone above and beyond in contributing their time and energy at Bower Farm. This annual award has been dedicated and named “The Martha Humphrey Award”.



This year’s very special recipient graduated from the MSUE Oakland County Master Gardener course in 1997 and received Advanced Master Gardener certification in 1998.

She has served the society in many ways starting the first three years at MSU Tollgate Gardens. The next ten years were spent in the role of the Bower Farm Lead. During this time, Martha had made considerable additions to these

gardens, such as, the sensory garden, PAR vegetable garden, rose garden, herb garden, fragrance garden, rain garden, grasses and bulbs. Her dedicated spirit and tireless work in these gardens has produced many pounds of vegetables for the food bank and glorious perennials and annuals for everyone who visits to enjoy.



When asked for personal comments, her reply included these following inspirations: “First plant I ever grew was parsley in a 6-pack seed starter kit at the age of 10. My garden mentors are, my grandfather, and Frank Genovese, my first garden instructor over 30 years ago. At home I maintain a 20 x 40 garden of vegetables, perennials, and container plants, as well as houseplants. To support my gardening habit I work full time at a cancer hospital.”

Martha has achieved much since planting that first bit of parsley. She has spent 12 years with SOCWA as Master Composter and garden volunteer, and has been awarded

the SOCWA “Four Star” Volunteer Award for Sustained and Dedicated Volunteer Service. She has also been selected to be on the Master Gardener visionary task force for the State of Michigan.

Earlier in 2009, Martha retired her role as Bower Farm Lead, and as you have seen, is involved in many other volunteer activities. Congratulations and Thank You for all of your years of service.

—*The Master Gardener Society of Oakland County*

City of Chicago Parks

As we enter into the dead of winter, my mind wanders to the Travel Channel in search of blue skies and warm locales. With this in mind, it is never too soon to check out potential garden spots for spring and summer travel. I therefore offer you two potential gems in a great urban location. Once again my journeys took me to the city that derived its name from the Miami and Illinois Native American word for wild onions or leeks – Chicago. Some have even linked the city with skunks. But that’s another story. I visited two gardens – the Millennium Park Gardens and the Garfield Park Conservatory.

Let’s start with an overview of Millennium Park. The Park consists of almost 25 acres on an area that was formerly owned and used by the Illinois Central (IC) Railroad. Railroads have a long and important history in the Windy City. However, over the years, the IC area became rather unsightly and an eyesore to Chicagoans. The concept of Millennium Park was conceived in 1998 with the mission of transforming the railroad tracks and adjacent parking lots into a new parkland in Grant Park. Today, it is a major tourist magnet, combining architecture, sculpture and landscape design. Of particular interest is the five acre Lurie Garden which was completed in 2004. While the composition of the garden seasonally changes, it does contain countless perennials and grasses. It reminded me of what Illinois is famous for and can be found in its architecture and landscape – the Prairie. Giant hyssops, alliums, butterfly weed, asters, and coneflowers mixed with clumps of various grasses and sedges. Intertwined in this are boxwood, Russian sage, euonymus, redbuds, and arborvitae. There is a wooden footbridge over shallow water that divides the garden diagonally. Suffice it to say that a stroll in Lurie Garden with its fantastic backdrop of the Chicago skyline is a pleasant way to experience beautiful plants while taking in the Park’s sculpture, the squirting Crown Fountain (look for the changing pictures) and the 110 ton elliptical seamless stainless steel structure affectionately called “The Bean” or more formally entitled Cloud Gate (I guarantee that you will take a picture of your reflection on the Bean). The Park is open daily from 6 AM – 11 PM with free admission. See <http://www.millenniumpark.org/> for more information on the Park. Don’t forget to see Grant Park while you are at Millennium.

I next ventured westward on the Green Line “L” to Garfield Park Conservatory. Once you exit the “L”, it is a very short walk to the Conservatory. After I arrived and obtained a floor plan brochure, I discovered there are seven display areas or houses (Palm House,

Sweet House, Fern Room, Desert House, Aroid House, Show House, and Children's Garden). Walkways wind through and connect the various houses. I first visited the Palm House and saw chocolate trees, double coconut palms, Scheelea palms, and countless other palms too numerous to mention. Colorful bromeliads are scattered everywhere. Speaking of numerous, I never saw so many different ferns in my life as in the Fern House, my favorite house due to the presence of waterfalls. There were fishbone ferns, bear claw ferns, and china ferns, and even a large staghorn fern. The Show House was awash with orchids and seasonal blooms. I must admit a special fondness for the yellow hibiscus (as I have a double red one that is about 35 years old). The Sweet House contained citrus plants (grapefruits, oranges), bananas, papayas and pineapples. I found out what an aroid is at the Aroid House. It is houseplants gone wild with a Dale Chihuly "Persian Pool" glass installation. Outside the domes are a Sensory Garden (the ornamental purple peppers caught my eye), a City Garden, and a Demonstration Garden. The surprise of the day was the Lily Pool, complete with interesting flowers, grasses, and dragon flies. Most of the pond plants are not hardy and must be brought inside during the rather inclement Chicago winters. My friend who accompanied me found some varieties of lilies and grasses in the lily pool that he thought might be good for his home pond. We were able to ask the caretaker questions about the plants and get some recommendations. Questions on hours, exhibits, etc. can be found at the Conservatory's website <http://www.garfieldconservatory.org/>. As you may suspect, there are numerous shows, exhibits, events, clinics and workshops throughout the year. An added bonus, admission is free but donations are always welcome.



—Submitted by Jim Oldani

Plant History Quiz

Plants have a colorful history, and it's not an overstatement to say that some actually influenced world events. Here's a little something to do on a rainy day: Check out your plant history IQ with the following questions. Answers are at the end.

1. Name three plants that were contributing causes of wars.
2. What two plants helped spread the ideas and philosophies of major civilizations?
3. What plant helped build a new industry?
4. What two plants are the greatest food staples of the world?
5. What large grass has been used to build fleets?
6. Name three plants that played a role in colonization.
7. What plant is a symbol for architectural elegance?
8. Can you name any of the plants found in King Tut's tomb?
9. What plant caused an economic collapse?
10. What plant is the greatest boon to humanity?

ANSWERS

1. British tariffs on tea became a symbol of taxation without representation, and the Boston Tea Party set the stage for the American Revolution. Cotton, one of the cornerstones of the old American South, increased the demand for slaves, which some historians believe contributed to the Civil War. The opium poppy was behind the Opium Wars, 1839-42 and 1856-60, with England and France on one side and China on the other.

2. Olives and olive oil were the chief export of ancient Greece and, through their trade, the Greeks spread ideas that became the foundation for Western civilization. We also know a great deal about the ancient world thanks to the Phoenicians and Egyptians, who used paper made from papyrus. This ready source of writing material helped promote and spread literacy.

3. Christopher Columbus brought the vegetable gum we call rubber back to Europe after he saw natives tossing an elastic substance collected from caoutchouc trees (Hevea). It took 300 years before rubber was widely used commercially, and eventually rubber came into its own with the automobile industry.

4. Rice has the edge over wheat as the most widely consumed food from a plant. Both are steeped in history. For example, Alexander the Great introduced rice to the Western world when he brought it back from India. Seeds of wheat have been found with Iron Age implements. Columbus introduced the grain to the New World.

5. In Asia, the world's largest grass, bamboo, has been used to make everything from flutes to boats. Bamboo seeds and sprouts also are a food source.
6. The spice trade, particularly pepper, led to development of great merchant fleets, which in turn led to colonization. Later, sugar cane played a role in colonization. A South American tree, the cinchona, helped make possible colonization of tropical countries. Quinine, a cure for malaria, is produced from its bark.
7. Leaves of bear's breeches (*Acanthus mollis*) decorate the top of Corinthian columns and are often used to symbolize elegance and grace.
8. Plants found in King Tut's tomb include cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*), papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*), mandrake (*Mandragora*), lotus (*Nymphaea*), olive (*Olea*), willow (*Salix*) and nightshade (*Solanum*).
9. In the 1630s, prices of fancy tulips reached such staggering sums that investors lost entire fortunes on bulbs and often were forced into bankruptcy. The phenomenon, while most rampant in The Netherlands, spread to England and France.
10. No contest. It's a product of beans from the *Theobroma cacao* tree. Chocolate.

Organic Gardening Notes

You Only Need to Know Three Simple Things to Start Growing Vegetables Organically

Everybody knows the “don’ts” of organic gardening: don’t use pesticides, don’t use weed killers, and don’t use artificial fertilizer. It’s when we come to the “dos” that the trouble starts. It’s so unfamiliar and so much to remember. So here are three really simple things that will get you well on the way, and anybody can remember three things. Here they are: 1. never tread on your soil; 2. natural mulches; and 3. crop rotation.

Never Tread on Your Soil

Make permanent narrow vegetable beds, no wider than 4 feet (mine are 4 feet wide and 25 feet long) with paths between them 1½ feet wide. You can do all your cultivating, planting, weeding, and harvesting without ever taking your feet off the paths on either side of the beds, because the furthest you need to reach is 2 feet. So you need never tread on the beds – and I mean never ever. The idea is to develop soft soil that gets softer deeper every year, because soil compaction is the enemy of growth. Plants’ roots go down far deeper than we are aware. We think of garlic and onions as short rooted vegetables; however, when mature their roots go down 2½ feet. Mature lettuce roots go down 6 feet, and beets go down 10 feet. (To learn more about root depths you can Google *Root Development of Vegetable Crops* (1927), University of Nebraska, the classic in the field.) When you allow your soil to soften by not treading on it and by using natural mulches (which comes next) your vegetables’ roots can grow downwards, not outwards, so that you can plant them so that they just touch each other when they are

fully grown. This way, they will cover the entire surface of the bed, and your output will be greater than if you grew in conventional rows, despite the space taken up by the paths.

Use Natural Mulches

The ideal natural mulch is shredded leaves or, failing that, straw. Leaves and straw are readily available in the fall -- for free. Shredding is done ideally with a shredder, which isn't free or frequent passes with a lawn mower, but that is less efficient than a shredder. Apply the leaves to your narrow beds in the fall, at least 1 inch, better yet 2 inches. I like to have a permanent mulch. By the end of the growing season you will find that more than half the leaves have disappeared: they have decayed and become part of the soil. So in the fall you have the choice of mixing the remaining leaves into the soil. Shredding helps leaves decay faster; also shredded leaves stay in place, whereas unshredded leaves will blow away.

Mulches of shredded leaves have so many benefits that it's almost magic. First, as said, they add organic matter to the soil; more about this latter. Second, they prevent rainwater from evaporating, which means less watering. Third, they suppress the germination of weeds, by keeping the sun off the soil. A few weed species will germinate, but it's far easier to pull them because the soil will be moist, and there will be far fewer of them. Fourth, mulches prevent soil erosion by protecting the soil from the effect of heavy downpours. Fifth, they protect the soil and plant roots from the extreme heat of direct sun and ultra-violet radiation in summer. And sixth, they promote the growth of earthworm populations, the gardener's friends. Back to increasing organic matter: you need to increase it every year because: (a) it adds essential minerals to the soil; trees take the trouble to provide minerals to their leaves, and you can re-cycle them by just spreading leaves; it beats bagged fertilizer, and it's free; (b) it adds carbon to the soil which not only allows rainwater to infiltrate better but also retains it in the soil longer -- all part of the soft soil project; (c) it provides food for soil bacteria and fungi and therefore increases their populations; these are the invisible workers who make nutrients available for plants and help suppress plant diseases.

Rotation of Crops

Explaining crop rotation is easier with a diagram, but here goes anyway. I have a five-year rotation, which uses five garden beds. The idea is that each bed has different vegetables each year. So let's say that in the first year potatoes are in bed #1, and peas and carrots are in bed #2; then in the second year potatoes move to bed #2, and peas and carrots move to bed #3, and so on. So why do this? The first reason is to fool soil-borne plant diseases. The fungi that cause the diseases are always in the soil and they are specialists, just waiting for their favorite vegetable to come along. Take potatoes as an example: if we were to grow potatoes in the same bed year after year, potato scab -- a fungal disease -- wouldn't be a problem in the first year, but the population of the potato scab fungus would grow by leaps and bounds in the second and third years because of a steady diet of its favorite food. And the potatoes would show more and more scab. Rotation stops this population explosion.

The second reason for crop rotation is to provide your vegetables with the nitrogen they need. You do this by growing legumes – in rotation! Legumes are peas and beans, which you can eat, and clover, which you can grow over-winter. Bacteria that manufacture nitrogen live in the roots of legumes. When your peas or beans have finished producing, cut off the vines at ground level, leaving the roots to decay in the soil. You compost the vines, of course; they are rich in nitrogen also. Clover is a bit different, you sow it in September; in April you dig it all into the soil to decay – roots and tops both. You will want to devote a whole bed to peas and beans so that, by rotating them, your entire garden will get some nitrogen by the end of a four- or five-year rotation. Four or five years will provide all the nitrogen you will need, once the rotation is completed. The third reason for rotation is that different vegetables need different proportions of the essential mineral nutrients. For example, moving heavy phosphate users into a bed where light phosphate users were growing the year before helps even things out.

And that's it. Although the reasons for doing our three simple things are somewhat complex and not readily memorable, the three things themselves are simplicity itself. Believe me, once you've done them, you will never forget. And while these three simple things are the basics of growing vegetables organically, they make such good sense that they should appeal to any vegetable grower, organic or not.

—Submitted by Peter Bray

Wild Ones

"A new chapter of Wild Ones is being formed in Oakland County. Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes promotes environmentally sound landscaping practices to preserve biodiversity through the preservation, restoration and establishment of native plant communities. Wild Ones is a not-for-profit environmental education and advocacy organization. Those interested in joining can go to for-wild.org and designate OAKLAND HEADWATERS chapter as their chapter. For additional information or questions, please contact Barb Modlin at bmodlin@comcast.net or Jim Brueck at mdbrueck@sbcglobal.net .

Notes From Nutcase Nursery



Once again a new season of gardening is on its way to dazzle and confound us, to appease and please us. On a good day I feel the hope of spring in the warming sun and the melting snow and the dozens of seed packages I need to inventory. On a bad day, I feel a heavy weight of emptiness because the nursery has lost its most loyal family member and nothing is the same without her.

Big Dog, my constant and steady companion of over ten years, suffered complications from a surgery to repair her knee and took a sudden and heartbreaking turn for the worst. The operation itself was very simple compared to her other surgeries, but there is always a risk and sometimes bad things just happen.

Big Dog was the consummate nursery dog. A picture taken by Steven Nikkila for Janet Macunovich's article on "Dogs in the Garden" in a 2003 issue of the Michigan Gardener showed her at work, carrying one of her watering cans to the rain barrel. She had a lot of jobs at Nutcase and went about them with gusto. When it was time to fill the milk jugs with water for the houseplants, she could carry only one at a time but always went after me to pick up the ones I dropped on the way. She knew where they belonged and dutifully deposited them at the spigot, occasionally reprimanding them for going astray.

She learned to eliminate critters very early in her career. Always cleanly, neatly, and efficiently. Birds, chippies, mice, squirrels and other varmints were not allowed on the property. No butterflies or bees either. It took a few seasons before we got to the point where things that begin with B were allowed. She was a quiet and methodical hunter and one morning she dispatched 7 voles in 22 minutes. Unfortunately for the bunnies "Rabbit" begins with "R."

She greeted almost everyone with friendliness in her tail and joy in her eyes. Only the UPS guy was not welcome. I explained repeatedly that he brings mama plants and toys but that didn't matter. He would coax her with cookies but she just didn't take cookies from strangers. It was one of her rules.

The day we got her from a shelter we knew she was special. She climbed up in the truck, sat on the console and put her chin on Dad's shoulder for the ride home. Upon arrival, she walked right into the house, through the kitchen and dining room, down the hall into the den and up on the couch. She was an old soul, as if she had been here before. She knew everything, one of our clients always said.

She won over even the most anti-dog visitors. She didn't fuss over these people, just lay quietly at their feet and sooner or later, they would lean down and pat her black patent leather fur. Her patience was amazing. It took one of her predecessors six years to realize if you were still enough, squirrels can't see you. Big Dog knew instinctively about going into the Zen-like statuary mode. If she wasn't in my line of vision outside, I knew there was a squirrel on the premises somewhere, being watched by the stealth dog. Those were the only occasions she didn't come when called. Sometimes, even the promise of dinner wouldn't make her blow her cover.

As a new addition to the family, she took over retrieving the newspaper. On her first morning in a new place, she raced down the driveway toward the street (to my horror) and tackled the Sunday paper in its bulky plastic sleeve, leaving a trail of sections L through P, ads and sale papers in her wake. It's tough work fetching something that's the same size as you are. But she grew into it and got the job done day after day, no matter the weather. When the paper started coming only a few days a week, we had no way to explain the wrongness in the universe and she searched diligently every morning for it. Dogs don't understand Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. They only know TODAY. Somehow, though, Big Dog understood "now," "later," after church, and dinner. No wonder she was so good in the nursery - - - we were on the same schedule. Every-thing in the gardens has to be done if not now, then later by default not choice. After church we usually played by visiting her best furry friend Scarlett, and at dinnertime all other activities not affiliated with her dish must come to an abrupt stop.

To hurry me along she would start collecting my tools and take them to the garage or the back step. I was amazed when she first stole my stool on a job. I thought I was losing my mind. It was not quite the same as putting down a pair of scissors and forgetting where you left them. One moment the stool was there, the next it wasn't even in the yard. She wanted to go home so she took it to the car parked out in front.

Big Dog was a hunter, but not just devoted to critters. She pointed out all the spots being invaded by quackgrass. She loved to eat it, although I could never get her to demolish the roots. She respected the gardens and flower beds. She knew that only when it was empty could she set foot in the vegetable garden. The squirrels knew it too and many times their lives were spared by escaping into the potato patch. Voles and rabbits were not as lucky and she would leave their bodies on the back porch or better yet next to the garbage can. But she was not an indiscriminate killer. Once she discovered two very tiny and naked baby squirrels. She very gently carried one to me and showed me where the other was shivering. She had ample opportunity to get some revenge for all the years of squirrel torture and didn't.

Her security system was a big help at the nursery. Customers never seem to arrive on any set schedule and she heard them long before I ever did. And she would lead whoever passed her approval directly to me. I always felt safe wherever I worked. Some of us gardeners have a tendency to become preoccupied out there in the green zone and it always made me comfortable that I had a 93 pound guardian in close proximity.

She smelled flowers with me and I can't ever remember having to reprimand her for eating any.

I said that she was my constant and steady companion but she wasn't always that steady. A few months after adopting her from a shelter we became suspicious at how she pulled herself up from a prone position. We learned from x-rays that she was severely dysplastic and at ten months she had surgery which required breaking her pelvis on both sides, tilting the bone and putting it all back together with metal rods and screws. She had a hip replacement at age five.

Last fall she slipped on an advertisement card that fell from a magazine. I was sweeping the garage and she came to check on me and my dust pile. She never uttered a sound during or after doing the splits but quickly developed a limp. I checked her paw thinking she may have stepped on something sharp but there was no indication of a wound. When we went to the vet, I was told that she needed surgery for her knee. Because of her age and history, we tried a series of injections that thicken the fluid in the knee. They worked for several weeks but Big Dog's participation in the Fall Squirrel Olympics derailed the good effects of the shots. As fate would have it, she blew the knee in the one good bionic

leg. Her general health was excellent for ten-and-a-half, so we made the decision to try the knee surgery before she might injure herself further in wintry weather.

Unfortunately, a week after surgery we had a crisis. Big Dog became lethargic and refused dinner. It was discovered that she had eaten bandages and I became very suspicious that she had developed an intestinal blockage. We rushed her back to the hospital.

We got only one status report the next day and I decided to visit her, since it was allowed. They were waiting for me with not the news I expected. I met with the same doctor we had seen the night before. He told me that around 4:30 she had developed trouble breathing so she was on oxygen. Her lab tests indicated some serious changes and while we were looking at the results we were interrupted by a technician calling for a "stat." My poor puppy was the stat.

They asked if I wanted them to perform CPR. I told them that she had suffered enough. I put my head on hers and she breathed. Twice. The vet checked quickly and said he found a very weak heartbeat. I thought she was gone before but now I told them to "go for it." Seven people sprang into action but after what was just a few seconds I told them to stop. It took only seconds to realize that there would have to be a miracle for her to recover from everything she had been through and would go through now. I held her and then had to let her go.

The puppy we rescued from the shelter. The puppy who was in so much pain from dysplasia, but insisted on going everywhere with me in the car, that she vomited. The puppy that brought me my shoes as opposed to my slippers. The puppy who helped me recover from my own surgery by picking up anything I asked for - - the clicker, a pen I dropped, and even a quarter. The scamp that led us on a hunt for her collar in bitter cold darkness for an hour before a snowstorm that would have buried it until spring. Who, the next day, when the thrill of having both Mom and Dad out for exercise wore off, obediently delivered the missing collar to the back door step. The puppy who met a skunk at 5:30 in the morning and didn't get sprayed. The black furry kid who put her own window down in the car but never stuck her head out, just her nose. The puppy who became a calm and willing blood donor for other dogs in trouble.

She was my advertising and marketing manager at the Nursery, chief of security and customer relations and the truth is I've never opened the Nursery without her. Right now my heart just isn't into the work that needs to be done. I should be writing about all the things we need to be thinking about at this time of the year. Get your winter sowing done, do a seed inventory, check for germination rates on old seed. Drag that bag of frozen potting mix in from the shed for seed starting - - it should thaw by March. Make your wish list and return your bottles and cans so you can hit the early seed sales. Get your orders in to the catalog companies and take benefit from early bird specials. Prepare to be underwhelmed when they arrive and pot up the bare-root prizes so they can be coddled before planting out. Bone up on tomato diseases to be ready for info booths in May.

I miss her terribly now and will miss her more for she was a true garden dog. I always told her that she was Mom's best baby. Her real name was Paige.

Some Information You Should Know

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**Currently Available Opportunities: Communications,
Education, Project Support, Volunteer Activities**

Mission Statement

It is the Master Gardener Society of Oakland County's Mission to assist, enable, and encourage its members to use their horticultural knowledge and experience to help the people of their communities, enrich their lives through gardening and good gardening practices.

Michigan State University Extension- Oakland County
“Bringing Knowledge to Life”

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