

# Gardeners connect

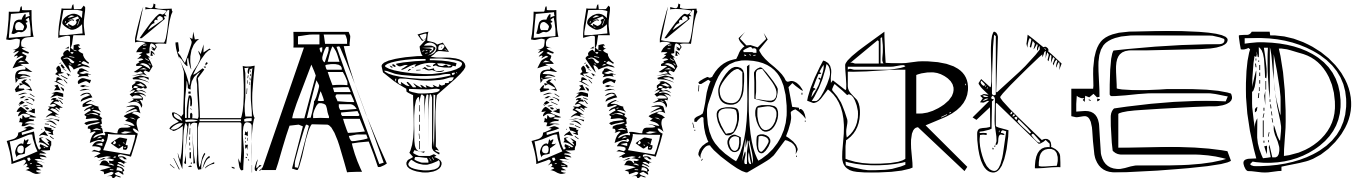


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WWW.GARDENERSCONNECT.ORG

January-February 2022

Our mission is to educate and inspire members of our community to become more complete gardeners.



## in our gardens last year

Let's celebrate some of the wonderful things in our gardens last year.

Maybe you will be inspired by what others have done. Thank you to all who contributed.

### Starting Lisianthus From Seed

By Barbara Fegley

This was my second season starting my annuals, vegetables and herbs from seeds indoors. I decided to tackle lisianthus this season for the first time. I read all I could find about them and watched YouTube videos and spoke with a friend who had some success the season before. There are many varieties, and some seem easier to germinate, some bloom earlier or later in the season. I chose to try three varieties: 'Arena Gold II,' 'Doublini White' and 'Arena III Red.' I decided this would be an interesting experiment and a learning season.

I purchased pelleted seed from Johnny's Select Seeds and placed them into 12-cell



BARBARA FEGLEY

**Lisianthus and zinnias from Barbara Fegley's garden.**

packs in pre-moistened seed starter mix and placed the humidity dome on them. I put them under LED full-spectrum lights on my sunroom porch, which is heated and stays about 62 to 68 degrees in the winter. I started the seeds the day after New Year's Day because lisianthus are something you have to be patient with. They germinated about 13 days later. I had to check them with a magnifying glass because the seedlings were so small at first. I removed the humidity domes once they germinated and proceeded to bottom water them as they needed. They like a bit of drying out between watering. I started feeding them with a dilute liquid fertilizer once a week in their water. I was delighted with their

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**WHAT WORKED, PAGE 3 >>>**

## PROGRAMS

Begin the year with with virtual programs in January and February, safe from the threat of cold, snow or ice. They will start at 10 a.m. Access them via Google Meet – online via <https://Meet.Google.com/jsk-wibg-bpw> or by phone at 219-321-0301 and enter the PIN 526 330 500# when prompted.

**Jan. 15**

"Growing Organic" by Tracy Flowers.

**Feb. 19**

"Clematis" by Linda Beutler.

**PROGRAM  
DETAILS, PAGE 14**

# Well, it's Official ...

By Dan Burkholder

Gardeners Connect President

It's officially winter, time to suspend the many outdoor chores and projects we gardeners all have, and time to relax. OK, you know I was kidding about getting to relax as there is always something that needs getting done. There is setting up a little germination table to grow some "hard-to-finds" from seed or sifting through the immense pile of plant catalogs to find the perfect item to fill that garden empty spot. Then there are all those non-garden-related tasks that we've put off for so long—the kitchen update or garage cleaning that you should really get moving on. There is always something to be done.

Even in the dead of winter, the garden can give us something to do. There are branches to pick up, garden tools to clean and sharpen, feeders to fill, and birdbaths to keep filled with water. This, however, leads back to more relaxing, as I never tire of watching birds fly back and forth between well stocked feeders and the heated bird bath, or simply feeding on the seed heads of this seasons coneflowers, and sedum. A cardinals brilliant red, or the azure of a blue jay against a backdrop of pure white make them truly the flowers of winter. Not to forget the other animals that are out and about, we have a bowl for dry dogfood we set out every night to feed the area opossums or raccoons, whoever gets there first.

Relax this winter as best you can. You have earned a little bit of "you" time. Spring is just a few short months away, and before you know it, we'll be back out there and hitting it hard.

Before I go today, I want to give a shout out to Chuck Robinson. Without Chuck, we wouldn't have these wonderful newsletters that we all look forward to. Chuck has to deal with our procrastinations and (my) questionable writing abilities, gather important news and relevant information, and put it all together into an entertaining and professional looking read. Thank you, Chuck, for all that you do! **GC**

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**Board meetings** are scheduled at 6:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month and currently are conducted virtually. Contact the executive director for details.

**Membership questions:** Direct questions to [Membership@GardenersConnect.org](mailto:Membership@GardenersConnect.org) or call 913-302-4234.

**The deadline** for submitting articles and notices for the March-April 2022 issue of the Gardeners Connect newsletter is Jan. 25.

**Send articles** and event information to Chuck Robinson, newsletter editor, at [Chuck@GardenersConnect.org](mailto:Chuck@GardenersConnect.org).

**Executive Director and Web Master** Brian Chadwick-Robinson can be contacted at [Info@GardenersConnect.org](mailto:Info@GardenersConnect.org) or 913-302-4234.

## Affiliate Organizations

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| Friends of Powell Gardens                     | Kansas City Community Gardens               |
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progress the ‘Doublini White’ were the most robust and developed second and third set of leaves before the other two. ‘Arena Gold’ was the next, with the ‘Arena Red’ plants being the smallest seedlings.

The seedlings were all planted into my raised beds the first week of April. I had frost cloth on hand if the temperatures dipped below freezing. I did use it over three very cold nights, and they came through it fine. The leaves elongated but it wasn’t until late May into June that I saw them start to put on height. ‘Doublini’ bloomed first, followed by the gold and then the red several weeks later.

My advice is to try it. They are beautiful in bouquets and last two weeks in a vase.

This coming season I plan to start the same three varieties as last year plus I will try an ‘Echo’ one and a ‘Voyage’ one – both are early bloomers – as well as an “Arena III Apricot,” which should bloom after the others have started.

## Soil Prep

By Deb Zahner

You’ve heard the adage, “Never put a \$5 plant in a 50-cent hole” This year I decided to put my money in soil prep instead of plants.

My go-to amendment is Nature’s Blend, which is a blend of cow manure and alfalfa meal. Alfalfa replaces lost nitrogen and contains a growth hormone, triacantanol.

Work Nature’s Blend in the soil around what you are going to plant, per package instructions, or around existing plants.

I had a bumper crop of the best tomatoes I’ve ever grown as well as prolific, beautiful roses. It worked for me!

## Squirrel Hide and Seek

By Margaret Ferman

One thing that worked for me this summer was I got some tomatoes from my tomato plants.

You see, my neighborhood has squirrels – lots of squirrels – and every year they eat more of my veggies than I do.

I have even caught them digging up and eating my beets. So this year I planted a few tomato plants among my flowers. I guess the squirrels just thought the ripening

tomatoes were blooms on the plants because they left them alone. I plan on doing this again next summer, only to a greater extent. Look out flowers, the veggies are invading!

The little peppers I planted were not attractive to the squirrels. I have no idea what variety they are, but they quickly turn red and are just a tiny bit spicy when you eat them. They produced quite a few peppers from the two plants I started. Lesson learned, I’ll save the seed packets from now on.

## Winter Sowing Works!

By Kristine Schrock

I was intrigued by Jill Moore’s article on winter sowing in the November/December 2020 newsletter.

I experimented with six different seeds, and the clear winner was a white fragrant alyssum (I don’t know the cultivar). I must have had close to 100% germination. I could line my whole front garden with them. Even now, into November, I’m loving their sweet scent as did the bees all summer.

## Raised Beds

By Phyllis Carlyle

In 2021 I decided to expand the small amount of vegetables I previously grew into a raised garden bed. My son’s family helped me build it in March in exchange for future produce. The cost of creating an L-shaped garden of 48 square feet was greater than I expected, but the materials used were well worth it.

Raised bed corners from Gardeners Supply were combined with 2- by 10-inch boards from Lowes. The corners are easy to use and attractive. Hoo, boy, pretreated lumber was high in 2021!

We purchased organic topsoil from American Topsoil and spent extra for the power wheelbarrow delivery. I had 2 cubic yards delivered and dumped, and I spread it myself into three areas in less than half an hour. I shared the delivery cost with my son, who had 5 yards of topsoil delivered and spread down a steep hill in an hour. This soil has produced well, and I highly recommend both it and the power wheel-



PHOTOS BY PHYLLIS CARLYLE

**Corners bought from Garden Supply were used in constructing Phyllis Carlyle’s raised vegetable beds. Below, power wheelbarrow delivery was worth the extra cost, she says.**



barrow delivery convenience

With the first planting in April, my success included growing broccoli, carrots, two kinds of lettuce, spinach, pea pods, basil, and tomatoes. Oh, the tomatoes! The yield from one cherry tomato plant and a ‘Better Boy’ plant was prolific. The patio tomato and roma plants were moderately successful. Cucumbers and pea pods did OK, and the cantaloupes and fall crop of broccoli were disappointing, mostly the second batch of broccoli because it was decimated by cabbage worms before it



could grow from nursery plants.

Since the raised bed seems more permanent than planting along the fence, I also planted asparagus.

As the growing season fades, I will put a layer of compost from my leaves and kitchen waste onto the beds and really look forward building on my success next year.

## New 'Wow' Feature

By Judy Jackson

I recently had to park in front of my house during some construction. As I sat in my car, I examined my front landscape. There are several conifer varieties but it still needed a "wow" for interest.

A few years ago I had received a gift of 400 edging bricks left over from my neighbor's project. When they offered, of course, I said yes. I reshaped the front bed adding curves and adding a new 10-foot addition.

My azaleas were scattered over the back yard in areas too shady to bloom. I gathered the five of them and planted them at the perimeter of this circular bed. Since they thrived and bloomed, it was now evident from my observation that this was the place for an ornament of some sort. A simple birdbath or planter would not do. It needed to be more substantial and bolder.

I had converted a large fountain base for a client into a sedum planter that had been though several winters in place. On Facebook Marketplace, I found an inexpensive well-used copper fire pit. I now needed a pedestal to set it on to give it prominence. After searching my stash of ornamental goodies I had collected, I settled on a 4-foot-tall galvanized industrial drainpipe that had a previous life between my garage doors holding a large ceramic sphere. My new/old fire pit planter fit perfectly and already had a hole in the bottom for drainage. After screening the hole and filling it with a well-draining soil mix, I thinned out the groundcover of multicolored sedums from my client's garden and planted my new planter. When my husband asks me once again what am I going to do with that, I can show him. I now have a beautiful and unusual WOW feature for my front landscape from found and borrowed items.

There a couple of things that didn't work so well.



JUDY JACKSON

**A repurposed drainpipe and a used copper fire pit have been turned into a planter with "wow" factor in Judy Jackson's garden.**

I have a generous nongardening neighbor couple who have allowed me to infringe on their property. They now tell me in the next two years they may move to a maintenance-free home. What seemed like a good idea at the time has left me now with a spring project of moving a 10-foot Canadian hemlock and a 6-foot magnolia 'Ann' that my grandson planted for me. The 40-foot Norway spruce and numerous viburnums will remain, and I hope my new neighbors like them. I have begun severing the roots around the trees for their move next spring. I will be exercising all winter to prepare. Wish me luck and strength.

A west exposure area against my neighbor's fence has become a shade to part shade bed over time thanks to an overgrown pear tree that dropped its fruit to rot and feed more squirrels. I relocated or potted up the plants that were suffering and realized the soil had not been tended to in many years. After double digging, incorporating compost, saved chopped leaves and breaking up the very compacted soil, I was ready to redesign and replant this area. I was nearly finished when I heard workmen taking down their tree. Now, I will have to dig up and repeat in the spring. At least the

ground is prepared.

## 'Carmen' Sweet Peppers

By Sally Cobb

I have had great success growing sweet peppers in containers. I have grown 'Lunch Box,' 'Banana,' 'Big Bertha' and my favorite, 'Carmen.' All came from the Kansas City Community Gardens, where I volunteer. 'Carmen' produces big sweet, horn-shaped peppers that are not hot but have thick, juicy walls. It was a 2006 All-America Seed Selection.

## Delighted by Alliums

By Sharon Weiser

This year's garden was bursting of alliums of different colors, shapes, and sizes. *Allium sphaerocephalon*, also known as the drumstick allium, was introduced to me at the 2020 Kansas City Garden Symposium at Nick McCullough's Garden Design Workshop. Nick recommended planting a mass because they are very cost-effective. I promptly planted 100 in the fall of 2020. This summer I was delighted with this variety. Rather than a show stopper, like the large flower globes of 'Globemaster,' it is used well as a drift in a perennial border. I had created five drifts in my red and purple color-themed perennial bed. In late June their 24-36-inch tall stems were topped with small egg-shaped purple blooms. Although new to me, this variety dates back to the 16th century. Many of the alliums are heirlooms.

I have grown the fabulous *Allium* 'Globemaster' – 24-36 inches tall with an enormous 10-inch ball on top – as well as *Allium schubertii*, an heirloom that looks like a 12-inch ball of purple fireworks on a 6-inch stem. I love these plants but my favorite this year was *Allium* 'Ambassador.' It was touted as one of the tallest and longest-blooming of the alliums. The 7-inch diameter globes are not as large as 'Globemaster,' but I prefer it. The height and the size of the balls are large enough to make a grand statement but don't look out of proportion to the rest of the garden.

You can extend the season of blooms by

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WHAT WORKED >>>



SHARON WEISER

The drumstick allium, *Allium sphaerocephalon*. Egg-shaped flower clusters emerge deep green and mature, top to bottom, to rose-purple. Below, ‘Summer Beauty’ alliums bloom in late July in Sharon Weiser’s Zone 5 garden. The flowers are lavender.



planting several allium varieties. *Allium moly* bloomed in early spring with golden yellow flowers on foot-long stems. The yellow flowers brightened up the shade where they were planted. *Allium azureum* with cornflower-blue flowers and *Allium caesium* with sky-blue flowers were also added. I was not really pleased with these two but feel I may not have positioned them in a place that best showcased their attributes. *Allium stipitatum* ‘Mount Everest’ with white blooms was a great addition.

Extending the season, *Allium* ‘Summer Beauty’ bloomed in late July for me in my

zone 5 garden. ‘Summer Beauty’ is only 18 inches tall with lavender balls on top. This variety has my favorite foliage of the group, with its glossy narrow leaves adding architecture in the garden even when the plants are not flowering. To further extend the season of my alliums, I spray paint the faded tan heads. Sometimes I paint them their natural coloring but I also have used orange, pink or yellow to complement the color scheme of the garden.

Alliums are said to be deer- and rabbit-resistant, but I cannot verify. I can verify that a large variety of pollinators love these plants. Alliums like full sun but I have planted some varieties in shade with great results. Most of the alliums are planted in the fall. Newly planted this fall are 25 *Allium karataviense*. I’m already getting excited for 2022!

### ‘Princess Emily’ Dogwood

By Kevin Dunn

It’s hard to narrow down the great performers in my garden, but this year the top honors would go to a *Cornus florida* cultivar called ‘Princess Emily.’

I first saw the ‘Princess Emily’ dogwood at KAT Nursery in Olathe, Kan., about five years ago. It was either late summer or early fall, when so many of the other native dogwoods at the nursery like ‘Cherokee Chief’ and ‘Cloud Nine’ weren’t looking so good with their spotted leaves and burnt leaf tips. The ‘Princess Emily’ trees stood out with their clean-looking foliage that was just beginning to color up with tinges of red so I bought one to test out in my own yard.

I think a lot of gardeners have just about given up on our native dogwoods and opted for the kousa dogwoods (*Cornus kousa*) that come from Asia. I would tell those gardeners not to give up hope on our native flowering dogwoods just yet. The two big foliar diseases afflicting so many other native dogwoods – anthracnose and powdery mildew – don’t seem to be such a big problem for ‘Princess Emily.’ For fall color, the kousa dogwood cultivars just can’t compete with our native dogwoods, including ‘Princess Emily.’

Another great fall feature of our native dogwoods are the bright red drupes, which are a great food source for birds – 43 differ-

ent bird species have been reported to eat the drupes and the buds.

A lot of experts will tell you that the kousa dogwoods are simply hardier trees than our native flowering dogwoods, but that’s not the case in my yard. My ‘Princess Emily’ dogwood growing in a much sunnier location is clearly outperforming the ‘Milky Way’ kousa dogwood with so many of its leaves burned at the tips and showing virtually no fall color. I’m not sure why, but KAT Nursery seems to be the only nursery in town where you can find the ‘Princess Emily’ dogwood.

Do the birds and yourself a favor and find a place for ‘Princess Emily’ in your garden.

### Reflections on Vegetable Growing

By Georgene Caoile

My high tunnel and surrounding vegetable growing areas provided family and friends with ample produce in 2021. The shelves in the basement are full of pickles, crushed canned tomatoes, pumpkins, spiced pears, and squash. The two freezers hold apples, corn, pears, freezer pickles, and peppers.

The garden is ready for loads of leaves to blanket the surface as the vegetable material was removed to feed a neighbor’s pigs. The owner of the pigs assisted in removing the steel fence posts, melon vines, tomato twine, tomato plants and 4-foot-long tomato roots. Wow! What a gift! And the pigs really enjoyed the sweet potato vines. The pigs can anticipate an early Thanksgiving feast next year!

When the sweet potatoes were planted, I placed small, metal staked plastic flags in each hill. The reasoning behind this action was to make it easy to identify and dig the potatoes. As the sweet potato vines grew and grew, the flags were covered by vegetation. Only by using a clipper to remove parts of the sweet potato vines were the markers in view. The flag markers did assist in identifying places to place the spading fork. The sweet potato crop was bountiful.

Two years ago, I purchased winter



squash seed from the Buffalo Seed Co. Mistakenly these were planted in the high tunnel. This vigorous plant clearly communicated a need for space. In spring of 2021 I planted one hill of winter squash at a corner edge of the garden. Fortunately, squash bugs were killed by the gardener prior to damaging the plant. And these vigorous vines produced 20 large winter squash. They are superb keepers and are delicious!

Planting different tomato varieties is always good practice. One never knows how individual varieties will produce depending upon the year. I have found that indeterminates are preferred, with many heirloom marriage tomatoes and some new varieties to be good choices. ‘Caiman’ produces a lovely, picture-perfect slicing tomato. And ‘Brandy Boy,’ ‘Genuine’ and ‘Mortgage Lifter’ are my personal favorites.

Due to becoming a “winter Texan,” I have developed a love for poblano peppers! Their flavors provide warmth without overpowering heat. Unbeatable stuffed or used in cooking with tomatoes and meat.

It is comforting to know that regardless of supply chain issues we are ready for winter. Please consider this an invitation to develop your own garden. Enjoy!

## Beneficial Predators, Fun Frogs

By Paula Diaz

2021 – what a year! The good, the bad, and the ugly. But sometimes the ugly is beneficial. Some things I noticed proliferating and growing happily in my garden this year, despite the crazier-than-usual Missouri weather, were predators. Particularly profuse were the assassin bugs, of which wheel bugs are a member. Not to be hurtful, but even their mothers likely find them a bit, well – homely, let’s say. Speaking of hurtful, you do not want to touch these helpful hunters. Luckily, I haven’t had that encounter myself but some really stoic folks attest to the painful probing of the slurpy straw they use to suck the insides out of other bugs.

This year I noticed they were literally awaiting the arrival of the Japanese beetles. The assassins were staked out on the hibiscus plants and on the blackberries about two weeks before the beetles showed



PAULA DIAZ

**A wheel bug, *Arius cristatus*, as an assassin bug that prey on other bugs, bees, flies and caterpillars. Wheel bugs stab their prey with a mouth part that resembles a soda straw. It delivers a paralyzing toxin to the prey and then suck out the victim’s body fluids.**

up. And they must have eaten many, as I noticed much lower damage levels from Japanese beetles, and the assassins were humongous. They won’t win a beauty contest, but they are definitely the good guys in my book, er, garden.

Soooo many froggies this year too! Seriously, if I moved a pot this year a frog or toad was sure to bounce into view. My granddaughter loved to find her green friends. She would often spot them much more quickly than I did. On her chair, on the patio chairs and table, around the edges of the decor, near the tiny pond, in her play house, on the tools – so many mosquito-slurping frogs! They are definitely a healthy population here and keep down the population of some of those less lovable insects. However, when I felt one on the interior front door handle before dawn one morning, he was strongly encouraged to leave the indoor insects to my elimination techniques.

Summer is always over too soon for me. And always more hectic than I’d like, but this crazy 2021 summer gave me the feeling that my surroundings are becoming balanced. The predators are keeping the balance in my little ecosystem. So often the first thing we think

when seeing a nonbutterfly insect is, “How do I kill it?” If instead can we remember that every member of our microenvironment has a role to play, even mosquitoes? After all, hummingbirds eat many mosquitoes, as do dragonflies and froggies.

I have some four-letter words for Japanese beetles, yet the other creatures are learning to eat them too. Woodpeckers are reported to share the feast that assassin bugs have found. The native and hardy hibiscus bloomed in profusion I haven’t seen for years. The blackberries were plentiful for freezing and sharing and eating straight out of the bucket as fast as a 2-year-old can chew. Research is indicating that even the aphids may serve a purpose on our milkweed, ensuring new, tender, juicy foliage will emerge in time for late season monarch caterpillars. And the adorable, sweet, cuddly ladybugs are predators, too, munching up aphids like tiny lemon drop candies.

The good, the bad and the ugly all have a role to play if we follow the “What would Mother Nature do?” mantra and give her the chance to manage the balance instead of thinking we must work so very hard at controlling every tiny part of our gardens. Slow down and eat some blackberries, and let Mother Nature do her incredible work for you. Hurray for predators!

## Torenia, Cherries, Lupines and More

By Jill Moore

Torenia – I always plant torenia Summer Wave™ Large Blue in my front porch pots as there are very few blue/purple-hued plants that do well on the shady north side of the house. On top of the constant color, the bees love them. This year was the best for these – only one plant per pot!

Cherries – I have a ‘Montmorency’ sour cherry tree that is 20 years old. Spring of 2021 was a great crop. This tree seems to alternate good and bad years. I do not spray the tree, so one year I will have small, buggy fruit followed by a great harvest of plump, blemish free fruit enough for eight pies!

Surprises this year were a second year of

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WHAT WORKED >>>



JILL MOORE

**A ‘Montmorency’ sour cherry tree produced a bumper crop in 2021 in Jill Moore’s garden. Below, torenia Summer Wave™ Large Blue is a good performer on the shady north side of Jill’s home.**



lupines returning, multiplying and blooming, plus an agapanthus that had been in a pot finally blooming after being transplanted into the ground. I also was successful with a great patch of blue, long-stemmed anemones.

Dahlias are a new passion. While I am getting a lot of blooms here in mid-October, the plants are a floppy mess. I will be researching better staking methods over the winter. If anyone out there has some tips for me, please email to me (moorecab4@gmail.com). The beauty and variety of blooms more than make up for the time and trouble to grow them.

Coleus – last winter I successfully kept several different varieties of coleus going so was able to plant a lot in pots and in the

ground this past season. I plan to do the same this year – so many beautiful colors and combinations to play with!

Alliums also did well – especially the ‘Purple Sensation’ variety.

## Mustard Greens, Native Plants

By Jill Draper

Several mustard plants wintered over in my garden last summer, and they bloomed in spring with cheerful yellow blossoms that attracted pollinators. I let one plant go to seed, and tried an experiment, laying stalks of the dried plant across bare spots in my veggie bed. It was around the end of June – a month earlier than I usually plant mustard seeds, but they didn’t mind. They came up anyway. Boy, did they come up! By fall I had enough mustard greens to feed all my neighbors (note: mustard greens are not as popular as homegrown tomatoes).

The always-dependable Swiss chard did well, too, producing leafy greens throughout the summer and into November.

My tomatoes, however, nearly drowned twice during two massive rains and were slow to grow. Next summer I plan to add more dirt and outline the place they sit with 3-inch-high landscape pavers to provide better drainage. It won’t be a true raised bed, but I’m hoping it will do the trick.

A long, shady area with mostly native plants runs along my front yard. It’s been slow to fill in, but I’m having the most success with roundleaf groundsel (*Packera obovata*), dwarf crested iris (*Iris cristata*), oak sedge (*Carex albicans*) and beebalm (*Monarda bradburiana*). I lost a half-dozen things (especially goat’s beard) that I planted in autumn, so I’m only planting perennials in spring from now on. I wanted five Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*) to be dominant bushes with other plants scattered around, but they haven’t grown much – probably they get too much shade.

An easy-to-grow native shrub in a sunnier spot is ninebark, which produces clusters of white flowers in May-June. I got a free seedling at the Discovery Center a few years ago, and it’s grown beautifully with little watering. Two bushes I’m thinking



JILL DRAPER

**Jill Draper has declared her front garden a native plant garden. The shrub is Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*). Below, *Monarda bradburiana* thrived in Jill Draper’s garden.**



of digging out next spring are baptisia or false indigo. I bought the wrong type, and they grow 4-5 feet tall instead of 1-2 feet. They’re pretty but take up too much space. Or maybe I’ll just prune them severely after they bloom? I’ll see.

## Lighter Containers

By Sally Grove

I have about a dozen big pots of flowers on my patio and front stoop throughout the summer. It’s a big job to plant them and a bigger job to clean them out, which is what I just finished doing.





SALLY GROVE

**Plastic containers in the bottom of a pot can lighten the load when you have to move it, suggests Sally Grove.**

I save plastic bottles and deli containers during the winter and use them in the bottom of the pots so I don't need as much potting soil. They are closed up tight and the water and roots go all around them. When it comes time to clean out the pots for winter, I remove the foliage and put it out for compost with my yard waste, and then dump the pot on a tarp. I dig out the plastic containers and put them in the trash (they are too dirty for recycling and I don't have the will to clean them up). I drag the tarp with the dirt to the woods behind my house and dump it there. Multiple trips! Depending on the size of the pot, I can have as many as 10 or 12 plastic containers in a pot with the dirt and flowers. I am 75 years old and just spent a little over three hours dumping and cleaning my flower pots to be stored in my garage over the winter. Glad to have that done before frost!

**More Shrubs to Cut Effort**

By Kathy Kasper

Our garden is 27 years old. Since we are aging, we have been replacing some annual and perennial areas with bushes. Double Play Candy Corn™ spirea, 'Blue Shadow' fothergilla, 'Brandywine' viburnum, 'Pearl Glam' beautyberry, 'Gold Crest' bluebeard caryopteris and 'Iljama' Japanese maple are new this year. They were picked for not only their flowers but for foliage color too.

We have found that it is helpful to keep

binders identifying areas of the yard with plant tags placed in photo and business card slots.

**Nasturtiums!**

By Bob Lane

People often forget the lowly nasturtium when planning their gardens. It's one of my favorite plants.

Among the advantages, it's the most forgiving plant I know. It loves horrible soil and lots of neglect, so it can go anywhere other plants protest against. It doesn't like fertilizer and could care less if one skips a couple of waterings. It gives confidence to beginning or lazy gardeners.

The best part is that its blooms are bright and cheery, it's leaves are fun-shaped plus tasty in your salad, and if it spreads out too wide just give it a casual chop and be on your way. What does it care!

Your investment? A package of seeds.

**Sweet Peas and Alliums**

By Kristin Niederberger

I'm not sure if it's the weather, because my yard is getting more and more shady, if I might be ready to make some changes, or, most likely, a combination of factors, but the past few years have been somewhat of a challenge in my garden. There are a few things, however, that have brought me a lot of gardening joy recently.

I started doing a bit of winter jug sowing several years ago, and sweet peas are one of the flowers I've been most excited about growing. I haven't had any success with them in the past, as the early Kansas City heat seems to do them in before they have a chance to get going. I've tried planting them in a variety of spots in my garden, hoping to get a perfect balance of enough sun but not too much heat, but I haven't had much success.

In 2020, I was ridiculously excited to get three whole blooms and was inspired to spend time studying seed catalogs to determine which varieties might do best in my garden. This past spring, probably due to our cooler weather, I was able to pick a few sweet peas every couple of days for about a month. I wasn't able to get huge bouquets like gardeners from cooler climates, and the



KRISTIN NIEDERBERGER

**Sweet peas were one of the plants Kristin Niederberger grew from seed using the winter sowing method. She also loves alliums, especially *Allium sicutum bulgaricum* (below).**



plants didn't last as long as I would have liked, but I was thrilled every time I was able to bring in a little handful of beautiful, sweet-smelling flowers.

I have loved alliums for a long time, and have been adding more of them to my garden in the past few years. I love the flowers on their own, and also how lovely they look mixed in with the plants around them. I definitely appreciate the big beauty bang they provide, while being virtually no maintenance. They haven't all done well, but many of the ones that have are naturalizing beautifully. *Allium sicutum bulgaricum* is one of my absolute favorite alliums, and I

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WHAT WORKED >>>



take an embarrassing number of photos of it during all of its blooming stages.

Thank goodness for treats such as sweet peas and alliums to keep me motivated and delighted even during difficult gardening years.

## New Enthusiasm for Sweet Alyssum

By Marla Galetti

Every year I include a variety of seedlings in my garden. This year a friend gave me an ounce of *Lobularia maritima* seeds, also known as sweet alyssum.

The few times I have grown it, I was disappointed. It was lanky at best, usually died out when it got hot. If I was lucky, it might redeem itself for somewhat of a fall show. I finally threw some out in May, mostly so I didn't hurt my friend's feelings.

As it started coming up, I was encouraged. I planted it on the corner of my flower bed, to soften the edge. It has become one of my favorite flowers. As I write this in the middle of November, it is in full bloom. It has gotten 12 inches tall. My clump has spread out and covers a 25- x 36-foot area in my garden.

This variety is available at Wildseed Farms. They sell their seeds by the packet, ounce or pound, and their shipping charges are reasonable. Their catalog gives you complete information, including planting success, germination rate, average seed per package or pound, as well as how many square feet you can expect to cover with your purchase. I hope this will encourage others to incorporate seeds in their flower beds.

Happy planting!

## Method for Planting Annuals

By René Miller

As we so often do, I borrowed this inspiration from another gardener and made it my own. To prepare for the various annuals I plant directly into my gardens, I dug individual holes large enough to accommodate the depth/width of a plastic growers pot. I tried to make sure the holes were deep enough so that the top of the pot was even with the ground level. (In my case, I used

the pots that typically hold 1-plus gallon perennials.) Next, I prepared the appropriate soil mixture along with a slow-release fertilizer, filled each pot, and then planted an annual into each pot. Lastly, I planted the container holding each annual into the prepared hole. I followed up by laying mulch so that the rim was covered and the area blended together visually.

It proved a successful way to easily meet the growing conditions of the various annuals, especially in the heat of summer. It made fall clean-up a breeze because all I had to do was pull the tired annuals out of the pots for composting. As an added benefit, I left all of the pots in the ground as a placeholder, thinking this will give me a head start in the spring.

## Flash for a Shady Garden

By Kathy Hoggard

It's not often that a saxifrage or a carex evokes a "wow" from a garden visitor. These are chorus-line plants, not stars. They inhabit the background, noticed only when mistaken for a weed.

This summer, however, two kinds of saxifrage and one carex brought genuine flash to my shady garden.

*Saxifraga stolonifera* produced scores of pink and white thumbnail-sized blossoms held aloft on sturdy 4-inch stems. The flowers were pretty as little orchids and more dazzling for the variegated rosettes of the foliage beneath them.

*Saxifraga urbium* 'Aureopunctata' was a showstopper even before it bloomed. With dark green leathery leaves, it looked more like a sedum than a woodland plant. Its leaves are spotted with bright yellow patches of varying shapes as though Dr. Seuss applied yellow paint. In late May, small pale pink flowers danced above the foliage. The catalog recommended moist shade, but it is holding its own in the shady desert of a maple tree.

I found *Carex scaposa* 'Cherry Blossom' sedge, in the Digging Dog Nursery catalog and immediately suspected it was one of those too-good-to-be-true plants. With broad leaves more like a lily than a typical carex and pink flowers that look like little sparklers, could this be for real? To my surprise, it performed exactly as pictured, and unlike the spring blooming carex in my garden, it



KATHY HOGGARD

**Dozens of small pink and white flowers are held above *Saxifraga stolonifera* on 4-inch stems in Kathy Hoggard's garden.**

bloomed late September into November.

## Delight Near the House

By John Kenney

As I have aged, my intensity of gardening is inversely proportional to distance from the house. I place pollinator-friendly plants in many areas of my yard, but I have one southern facing, front-of-the-house garden that I devote almost exclusively to pollinator plants. Large windows open to this area for viewing from the back of the garden. About 13 years ago, my gardening misconceptions began correction with the Johnson County Extension Master Gardener program. I removed the winter creeper and incorporated a lot of compost and expanded shale.

This area starts the year with crocuses and grape hyacinths followed by several clumps of daffodils. Along the way, a couple of red tulips and one yellow tulip remain from over 10 years ago. A patch of 'Alexander White' iberis appears about this time. Along the back of the garden,

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WHAT WORKED >>>

against the house, there is a 3-foot-wide area planted with a variety of gift irises. I have hardy lilies, some from Lilypalooza, planted among the iris.

Not all of the plantings are native. For instance, I have three ‘Morden Gleam’ *Lythrum* that, although shunned, bloom for months and attract a lot of bees. I have ‘Caradonna,’ ‘May Night,’ ‘Crystal Blue’ and ‘East Friesland’ salvia that bloom a good part of the season if I deadhead them. Coneflowers, plains coreopsis, *Liatris aspera*, slender mountain mint, and ‘Husker Red’ penstemon bloom through the season. The plains coreopsis self-sows almost too readily, so I let it volunteer here and there for a good show of yellow. After it blooms, I harvest seeds and pull a lot of it to create space for the garden phlox. I have several containers of tropical milkweed plus some volunteer balloon milkweed in the ground that hosted more monarch larva than in recent years.

In late August and September, I have ‘Golden Fleece,’ a dwarf goldenrod. A patch of Profusion Yellow zinnias have volunteered the last few years and bloom until a freeze gets them. The tropical milkweed lasts until it is cold enough to kill the aphids, then I bring two pots in to overwinter in sunny windows. Invariably, I don’t get all the aphids, and the pots go out for a short spell.

This year it seems that everything performed very well except the Chinese trumpet lily *Lilium regale album*, which usually does great. Most of the plants in this bed seem to accept whatever weather they get. Perhaps that is why they stick around. This garden gives me pleasure because it is right under my nose, allowing me to play in it outside or view it through the window.

## The Gift of Time

By Mary Smead

I don’t know about you, but I felt like the earth suddenly stopped spinning when COVID-19 hit. Everything stopped. I kept asking myself, “What am I going to do to with all of this time and nowhere to go?” The garden had not yet awakened as I walked through it in March 2020 thinking those thoughts. As I looked around at my much-loved flowers beds, I suddenly had



MARY SMEAD

**Disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic gave Mary Smead time to re-design her garden. Below, Tuff Stuff™ mountain hydrangea has long-lasting pink lacecap flowers.**



an epiphany. I had been given the gift of time to play in my garden! And so I did.

If you are like me, my garden design evolved over time. I would add a few new favorites here and a few there and hope it worked well together. Now I could analyze what I had already planted and could expand some beds, removing all the oldies that were shabby. By the end of March I decided to pull almost everything out of my front yard, move a sickly Japanese maple and rebuild a sloping hillside. But I needed help with the new design. I turned to my husband, who was recovering from shoulder surgery, but he just shook his head and wished me good luck! Then I remembered a naturalist I had worked with at Powell Gardens, Caitlin Bailey. I knew that this project was going to be bigger than I could

handle and that Caitlin would come to my rescue.

Caitlin had lots of great suggestions. I told her the things I wanted to try, namely sedges and hydrangeas, but was open to other suggestions. I loved the idea of mixing natives with what I call my grandma’s favorites. Caitlin and I poured over the catalog from Missouri Wildflower Nursery as she shared her wealth of plant knowledge with me. We collaborated well, and by the end of April old plants were pulled out, beds expanded and new seedlings planted. I couldn’t wait to see what worked and what didn’t!

Oak sedge, *Carex pensylvanica*, was a great addition to my sloping little hillside. In between the sedges we planted downy phlox, *Phlox pilosa*, and shooting star, *Dodecatheon meadia*, which gave variety and color in the spring. Another success was the Tuff Stuff™ mountain hydrangea, *Hydrangea serrata*, a beautiful pink lacecap variety with long-lasting blooms.

What didn’t work well was Jacob’s ladder, *Polemonium reptans*. This native plant prefers moist, rich soil, and I am afraid that my front yard is just too dry for it to survive, even though I used a nice thick layer of fine mulch and watered it well. But finding the right plant in the right spot is the quest of every gardener I know.

If COVID has taught me anything, it is to take the time to do the things I love. I enjoy walking through my garden and watching the changes from season to season. I hope that over the last 18 months you have had time to do the same.

## Time to Rejuvenate My Garden

By Bibie Chronwall

This is what worked for me.

An aged and overgrown spirea shaded out the front border. Big branches went down one by one and finally the roots were excavated. Morning sun lit up the border, and I saw a good reason to extend it, getting rid of more lawn and planting more shrubs to be enjoyed most of the year. I tucked in some left-over irises as well. Looks good.

The square-trimmed *Taxus* hedge along the driveway looked aged and uninspired.



Its removal needed professionals – called in The Greensman. Within an hour the hedge was gone and planting could begin. I had envisioned a planting of mostly evergreens: different shapes, heights, structures, and colors. Maybe some non-evergreen shrubs as well. The professional eye picked out an imaginative collection of species and planted them with artistic flair. This was fun and successful. For once I made a map of the border with name and tags attached. Stimulated, I'll spend the winter making labels and maps. And mark where the spring bulbs are hidden.

Over the years I have acquired an assorted collection of Lilypalooza bulbs. Lilies pop up in surprising places. Now I have finally applied some structure to the hodgepodge bed by moving the tall ones to the back, the short ones to the front, and leaving the goldenrods in the middle. Once the goldenrods come up in late summer, they will dominate and overhang the fading lilies. That's the plan. We'll see if it works.

## Hydrangea, Salvia, Basil Were Stars

By Melanie Cavender

In every gardening year, there seem to be a few stars that outperform the others. This year, my Quick Fire® hydrangeas were covered with large blooms from head to toe. I was mesmerized by the extensive varieties of pollinators buzzing among the beautiful blooms.

My full sun bed bordering the front of my villa opened new opportunities for heat



MELANIE CAVENDER

**Salvia nemorosa 'Rose Marvel' put on quite a show in Melanie Cavender's garden. It is a dwarf salvia with larger flowers, and it reblooms.**

thriving perennials. *Salvia nemorosa* 'Rose Marvel' was spectacular! It spread quite nicely with bright fuchsia spikes packed together. No rangy, sprawly salvia was she. I have it planted where its bright pop of color draws my eye daily, which made it easier to deadhead as the spires faded. I did this faithfully. The combination of plant, site, and care has made this a star in my garden.

My new happy place was my deck. In full sun, it was filled with large containers of herbs including two types of basil – 'Cardinal' for its eye-popping blooms and sweet basil for my "famous pesto." Once the rain stopped and the heat came, it grew and was cut, then grew back and was cut again and so it went all season. I have a record 10 jars of pesto in the freezer for winter.

Along with the herbs, I planted 'Sungold' cherry tomatoes, banana peppers, and the hottest chili peppers ever. As the plants grew taller and wider, I thought I would never savor their produce, and then in late July they exploded. The 'Sungolds' were like candy and produced enough for salads and pasta even after my husband snacked on them right off the vines. The banana and chili peppers were also abundant, although the chilies were so hot, no one could eat them.

All in all, this was a very productive and lovely season in my small gardens and, despite early downpours and basil-chomping Japanese beetles, quite a joy!

## Perennial Plant Successes

By Dan Burkholder

What worked for me in 2021? It was such a wonderful year, I'm not sure where to begin. I've always been a follower of the Perennial Plant of the Year organization, and enjoy trying out their suggestions. My 'Sun King' aralia (2020) has done quite well in three separate garden locations, along



DAN BURKHOLDER

**Dan's beehive is a top bar hive, which opens from the top, which exposes the bars where the honeycomb hangs. It is painted lavender to color-coordinate with the irises, alliums and other flowers in the garden.**

with 'Millenium' allium (2018), and *Amsonia hubrichtii* (2011).

As great as these plants have performed, I am over the top excited at how well the 2021 PPOY has worked out for me this year. Calamint (*Calamintha nepeta*) graced my garden with delicate white flowers that surprised me by changing to a beautiful shade of lavender around the beginning of October and are still blooming here on Thanksgiving! Calamints gray-green foliage gives off a wonderful minty aroma, and the plant has a tidy, well behaved appearance. I highly recommend you find room in the garden for this little guy.

As great a year this has been for my garden plants, I think what worked best for me and my garden this year wasn't a plant at all, it was my first beehive! It's a top bar hive painted a peaceful lilac shade of purple that looks quite at home in my garden as it blends in with the spring irises and alliums, the summer phlox, and the nearby clematis.

On Earth Day this spring I populated the new hive with three pounds of Italian honey bees, and the numbers grew all summer as the hive was an area of constant activity, a wonderful sight to witness. Today (Thanksgiving) I took a look through the viewing window on the side of the hive and am guessing the population has more than doubled from the original, and contained four full combs of honey. I have no plans to

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WHAT WORKED, PAGE 13 >>>

# Considering 2021 and a Book Review

By Jen Stefanchik

Last winter I came across a book that inspired me to considerably change things up in my garden, all with the goal of improving the health and output of my harvest.

Of course, most changes one makes in their garden are meant to improve yield. However, this book took a common gardening concept for elevating your harvests and completely changed the way I thought about it. The recommendations provided by the author suggested plant combinations that minimize disease, reduce pests, and boost soil fertility while supporting pollination, which together improve your garden harvest. Simply planting the right plants adjacent to one another can help bring in beneficial insects, manage weeds and even provide physical support as a living trellis.

If all this sounds like companion planting to you, it is. But Jessica Walliser's book "Plant Partners – Science-based Companion Planting Strategies for the Vegetable Garden" turned everything I thought I knew about companion planting on its head. For one, the book is based on research from universities and agricultural facilities. For years, I've been planting basil next to my tomatoes only because that's how my grandmother did it. I really didn't understand the science of why the combination worked or what specific benefits were being provided. While many of these gardening traditions aren't wrong, there is new research validating these techniques and expanding on them.

Secondly, the book suggests new companion planting ideas to improve the overall ecosystem of your garden. For example, there are techniques to improve your soil and bring not just more pollinators to your garden but specific ones to pollinate specific fruits and vegetables. It challenges you to consider your entire landscape and not think of your veggie garden as a separate entity from your ornamental, cut-flower, and herb beds.

The book is broken into eight chapters. The first explains the meaning of plant partnerships. It outlines some important concepts and terms that help form the basis for research studies leading to the recom-

mendations made in the book. The remaining chapters each focus on one of seven benefits of companion planting. Within each chapter, Walliser discusses mixed-planting strategies based on her studies of available research.

Last year, I implemented several of the recommendations in my garden, and I believe they made a difference. I'll highlight a few of my favorite ones in this article but there are many other tactics throughout the book that I look forward to trying in 2022 and beyond.

## Soil Preparation and Conditioning

Chapter 2 takes on soil management and recommends numerous ways to improve your soil without tilling. The concept of no-till gardening is not new, but Walliser introduces what cover crops are and specifically how to use them in supporting a no-till garden.

For example, leguminous plants can be used as nitrogen generators to improve companion plant growth and yields. Most plants, especially your leafy green ones, are heavy nitrogen feeders. But, as you probably know, members of the pea and bean family (*Fabaceae*) have the ability to add nitrogen to the soil. This is why many plants from the *Fabaceae* family are used as a cover crop and are worked into the soil once they die. However, these plants also can share nitrogen while they are still living and that concept leads to new companion planting strategies.

Last year, I planted bush beans in between my potato plants, as the book suggests. Potatoes are heavy nitrogen feeders and the science here indicates that nitrogen from the living bean plants will improve my potato harvest. Overall my harvest was very good last year. It was more uniform than in years past, and for some varieties this resulted in bigger potatoes. It was also



JEN STEFANCHIK



**Planting basil with tomatoes can help reduce populations of hornworms and yellow-striped armyworms by interfering with the insects' egg laying patterns.**

a great use of space.

I adopted one other companion planting strategy from this chapter: planting lettuces under peas. My peas were grown up a trellis, and once it warmed up enough I transplanted my lettuce starts underneath the trellis. The peas provided additional nitrogen to support the heavy feeding lettuces and also provided shade in late spring. In the past, I have planted carrots and beets under my pea trellis, but the lettuces were easier to plant and manage underneath the trellis. In addition, they were some of the healthiest lettuces in the garden, lasting until early summer. I know I'll be using this technique again and again.

## Weed Management

Weeding is a tedious chore for every gardener. It seems like new weeds pop up overnight. Using cover crops to minimize weed growth can be helpful and are referred to in the book as a living mulch.

I employed two of the book's living mulch strategies last year to help manage our weeds. I planted cucumbers under taller tomato plants. This worked surprisingly well, and the cucumbers just weaved their way among the tomatoes, blocking out weeds.

I also planted winter rye under asparagus. The trick here is to plant rye in late spring after your asparagus harvest is complete. Rye will naturally die back with the heat of summer, so no need to worry about it self-seeding. As the book suggests, I did have to water more frequently, given

See **BOOK REVIEW**, next page



harvest the honey, I'm going to leave it all to the bees as they worked so diligently to produce it.

Great performing plants along with thousands of busy little bees has made 2021 a real year to remember in my garden.

### Joyous Early-blooming Small Bulbs

By Barbara Irick

Several years ago we visited Chanticleer gardens in Pennsylvania in early September. As I was walking around, I noticed fall blooming crocus planted in the lawn area under some shady trees. They were such a lovely surprise that the idea stuck with me. We have a small area of lawn on the east side of our house under the neighbor's tree where there is a slope. It is a dry area with dappled shade most of the day. The grass is thin and grows slowly there, but I really don't want to give up that green space to another dry shade flower bed. My husband agreed that he would be willing to try not

cutting the grass there until the end of May each year and to stop cutting it the end of August. I planted fall blooming crocus with a trowel in the bare spots in amongst the grass just scattering them about, hoping they would naturalize in the area. In the spring, the slender crocus leaves came up and made the grass look a little thicker. During the summer, the area gets cut about once a month since it grows so slowly. In the fall I was rewarded with little lavender crocuses blooming on my shady hillside.

This November I was in a local nursery promising myself not to buy anymore tulip or daffodil bulbs since I was "done" planting for the year. Then I noticed they had bulbs on sale. I was just looking around and realized they still had a lot of early-blooming small bulbs that would be a perfect addition to my little hillside. Spring crocuses, a miniature daffodil, and several varieties of small purple or blue spring flowering bulbs. The bulbs were all small, so planting them sprinkled around on the hillside took no time at all. The hillside

is sunnier in early spring before the trees leaf out so these early flowering plants will get sufficient sunlight when they pop up. I can't wait for spring see how they look!

### Sweet Potatoes, Beans, Nasturtiums and Tomatoes

By Steve Hess

**Sweet Potatoes** – Sweet potatoes grow well here in the Heartland. I used to order sweet potato starts by mail but this spring I experienced sticker shock when I discovered it would cost me \$36 with shipping for 12 measly sweet potato starts! Instead, I picked up a couple of tubers from the produce department of my local grocery store. After washing them gently, 4 toothpicks were inserted around the middle and the tuber was set upright in a glass of water and placed in a sunny window. In a few weeks, the eyes of the potatoes began

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**BOOK REVIEW**, from the previous page

the rye plants competed for some resources with the asparagus, but it did help suppress other weeds in the patch.

#### Support and Structure

This chapter describes using plant partners as living trellises. While there are several clever tactics identified, the one that worked best for me was letting gherkin cucumbers grow up the flower kiss me over the garden gate. I have never grown this flower and had always wanted to try it. I planted it next to the tomatoes and cucumber that I planted for weed suppression and the cucumber climbed right up it. It was a great plant for pollinators too. I did notice it attracted Japanese beetles, but that was OK as I then knew right where to find them so that I could drop them into my bucket of soapy water.

Next season, I am looking forward to trying sunflowers as a trellis for mini pumpkins and sunchokes as a trellis for cucamelons (also called mouse melons or Mexican sour gherkins). Any chance I have to grow something up a trellis I will take, as it allows more space for other veggies.

#### Pest Management

The book lays out several methods for deterring pests from using trap crops as lures to using plants to mask or hide host plants. This was my favorite chapter because, as you know from previous articles, I am always looking for new ways to battle my archenemy, the squash bug. The best guideline from this section was to plant nasturtiums with zucchini to deter squash bugs. While the book recommends doing this with summer squash, Walliser suggested the combination might work for winter squash too. I planted nasturtiums under my butternut squash this year and didn't find any squash bugs there until September. I employ many strategies to deter squash bugs so I couldn't say doing this alone would make a huge difference, but I believe it contributed to my success. As a bonus, nasturtium flowers and leaves are edible, and they add a pop of color to your salads.

#### Summary

Other companion planting strategies in the book include disease management, biological control and pollination. The chapter on biological control was very interesting

as it presented the concept of conservation biological control. This type of biocontrol focuses on choosing plants that act as food sources, egg-laying sites or dwelling locations to attract good predatory insects to your garden. There are so many other things I want to try from this chapter such as planting black-eyed Susans and cosmos with cole crops to draw in the beneficial insects that eat aphids.

If this gets you excited, as it did me, then consider reading this book and some of Walliser's other books, including "Attracting Beneficial Bugs to Your Garden." It is a great companion book to "Plant Partners," helping you to identify those beneficial bugs and keep welcoming them into your garden. **GC**

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Jen Stefanchik is a member of Gardeners Connect and a Master Gardener of Johnson County. She has been growing vegetables for more than 19 years. She is passionate about sharing her love of horticulture and helping others start their own thriving backyard gardens. She can be reached at Jennifer.Stefanchik@gmail.com or follow her on Instagram @kcgardeninggirl.

# Join us for Virtual Programs in January and February

The start of a new year brings hope and promise to gardeners. New ideas, new plants and the discovery of what has worked. We hope you will join us for the 2022 speaker series beginning this month and continuing throughout the spring.

While the speaker series is still being held virtually, at least for now due to the ongoing COVID pandemic, moving forward beyond the pandemic at least January and February may remain virtual. No more having to worry about the weather not cooperating, and no need to go out in the cold or dodge icy patches.

Bookmark this link in your favorite browser so you won't miss any of the Saturday online presentations.

<https://Meet.Google.com/jsk-wibg-bpw>

## 'A Year in the Life of an Organic Gardener'

By Tracy Flowers  
10 a.m., Jan. 15

Many of us want to be more organic in our gardening practices and work with nature rather than fight it. Sometimes we just aren't sure how best to implement that organic idea into our actual gardens and be successful.

Tracy Flowers is going to take us through "A Year in the Life of an Organic Gardener." Some of you may remember her from her time at Powell Gardens or the Ewing and Muriel Kauffman Memorial Garden. It was at the Kauffman Memorial Garden, where she turned to an organic approach to solve ongoing pest issues. That led her to be an organic gardener in her own garden and working at the Kansas City Community Garden and the Giving Grove.

Now, with 15 years of experience of being an organic gardener here in the Kansas City area, she has started a business last year that works with area nonprofits to promote organic farming and education. She is a member and business supporter of Gardeners Connect and will take us full

circle through four seasons of being an organic gardener and how we just might become one ourselves.

Join us online Jan. 15 at 10 a.m. for the program.

## 'Clematis Myth Busting'

By Linda Beutler  
10 a.m., Feb. 19

Clematis have been described as the queen of vines. The variability of flower shapes from dainty vases to exuberant flowers larger than your outstretched hand in a range of colors they shine in the garden like you would expect of such royalty.

The queen of vines

also has a seemingly complex issue surrounding pruning for rebloom that involves assigning clematis to groups that then have lots of rules. It can be daunting for even the most experienced of gardeners. What then is a gardener to do after the flowers fade to insure a bountiful return? No fear, Linda Beutler, curator of the Rogerson Clematis Collection in Lake Oswego, Ore., returns to present, "Clematis Myth Busting: Towards a Common Sense Approach to Pruning." A more practical, new way of thinking about pruning that dispenses with clematis pruning groups entirely and can make even the most daunted of gardeners confident clematis pruners.

Linda is author of two published books on clematis, "Gardening With Clematis" (2004, Timber Press) and "The Plant Lovers Guide to Clematis" (2016, Timber Press). A floral design instructor, she also has written "Garden to Vase."

Join us online Feb. 19 at 10 a.m. for the program.



## WHAT WORKED

to sprout and grow. When they got to 3 or 4 inches long, they were snapped off at the tuber and placed in a jar of water. In no time roots sprouted and were ready for individual potting. I held them inside until it was warm enough to harden them off and plant them. That worked well up front.

At harvest, I learned that you cannot leave sweet potatoes in the ground later into fall. They will blacken and begin to spoil, especially when the weather begins to get cool. I harvested the sweet potatoes in mid-September this year and allowed them to cure for two weeks in my shed. After that, they went to the fruit cellar. This two-week curing process is key. It forms a protective outer skin and converts the starch to sugar which results in superior flavor.



STEVE HESS

**Succession planting nasturtiums can give you a glorious display in September and October.**

**Nasturtiums** – Nasturtiums are an easy, simple joy in the garden. I have always thought of them as very tender annuals that flourish in spring, retreat in the heat of summer and return briefly in the fall. This year, they were most glorious in the fall, all through September and October they covered the garden with an array of gorgeous blossoms, both in beds and containers. You can succession plant them because they sprout and grow quickly – very easy fill-ins where other plants have pooped out! If we get an early frost, they will be one of the first to succumb, but this year that just didn't happen!

The virtual meeting link for January and February

<https://Meet.Google.com/jsk-wibg-bpw>

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# Orchid Society Plans In-person Meetings

The Orchid Society of Greater Kansas City plans to present in-person meetings in January and February. The meetings also will be offered via Zoom teleconferencing for those who do not want to attend in person.

The new location is at the Merriam Community Center, 6040 Slater. Organizers say the room is spacious enough to allow attendees to spread out and remain coronavirus safe.

Each program is scheduled to start at 1:30 p.m. with a beginner's group and culture roundtable discussion before the featured speaker. Guests are welcome.

On Saturday, Jan 9, area orchid grower Mark Prout, who also is an American Orchid Society judge, plans to present a program titled "Eye of the Beholder."

On Saturday, Feb. 13, Peter T. Lin, owner of Diamond Orchids in Southern California, is scheduled to talk about "Miniature Vanda Species and their Hybrids." **GC**

**Less is More with Tomatoes** – We grow tomatoes in a series of rotating 4- by 8-foot raised beds. For years I planted eight tomato plants in each of the raised beds



STEVE HESS

**Vining green beans interplanted with purple hyacinth beans in 3-foot-tall tubes of chicken wire protected them from rabbits and was visually stunning.**

and have come to dislike the amount of work it took to maintain and clean up this jungle of plants. I thought it was necessary to maintain high production. This spring, I planted only six plants per bed, and guess what? The plants were bigger, healthier, easier to care for and produced more tomatoes per bed than the eight-plant version.

### **Climbing Green Beans/Hyacinth Beans**

– Filet green beans are a favorite vegetable not only for gardeners but for the darned rabbits as well. They do not munch just one or two – they wipe them out!

This spring I lost three entire plantings to rabbits. So I fashioned four 3-foot high tubes of chicken wire and planted 'Cobra' climbing green beans inside each tube, interplanting purple hyacinth bean vines for interest.

Ha-ha-ha! The rabbits could not touch the bean seedlings, and the plants grew up lush and high on a garden arch, producing gorgeous, picture-perfect beans for us to eat. The plants created a stunning display in the garden too! **GC**

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