

2024
SPRING
HOME & GARDEN

Spirit of Bainbridge



Spring Is About to Happen!

By Anne E. North

Yes, I know. We have almost three weeks yet until the Vernal Equinox occurs. Sometimes I feel if I write about the anticipation of a new season, it will hurry it along somehow and then, of course, we all bemoan how quickly time flies, don't we?

As I mark days off on our calendar, my spring To Do List grows proportionately. The earliest of these items is always picking up trash and tree branches in the yard. (We did a neighborhood trash pick-up, too!) And we were graced with tiny greening plantlife and soon, crocuses and daffodils!

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We have endlessly discussed plans for our flowers and garden—we need to scale back costly annuals and invest in more perennials; we need to limit cucumber plants to two and eliminate zucchini due to space!—and the next step is to make a "shopping list" and haunt local greenhouses for our preferences. (And we have already checked in with our high school classmate, Lise, who starts hundreds of tomato plants in her greenhouse and graciously offers us each two. Talk about sharing her green thumb and love of gardening!)

Those warm temps of February "bonus days" lured us outside to slowly begin the process. However, we continually reminded ourselves not to disturb leaves and other plant matter that could be harboring tiny creatures who are dormant for the winter. So we confined our efforts to picking up twigs and limbs and just soaked in the warmth of the sunshine. And we grilled out twice, so it

was truly a "bonus"! We'll share a tip we put into practice late last summer: When firing up the grill, cook two or three different meats—maybe smoked sausage, chicken breasts and thighs, and burgers—have one for dinner that night and refrigerate the others. Your meals for the weeks are under control! Just add a couple of sides, maybe make enough salad for two meals—store in zipper plastic bag with no dressing and a paper towel then gently press the air out and you will be surprised how fresh a tossed salad stays! Can you tell we're tiring of winter meals and ready for spring?!

But one spring-related meal we never tire of is corned beef and cabbage for St. Patrick's Day! Remember to slow cook your corned beef for several hours the day before, chill it overnight, and it will slice nicely without crumbling!

Along with the "shopping list" for seeds, flowers and plants, it's a good idea to sketch your gardening intentions. And remember the spacing each plant requires when doing so! I always refer back to notes I made last September when we were cleaning up the yard. (I paperclipped them after the December page of the calendar and then shifted them into the new 2024 calendar.)

And finally, we are realists enough to know cold weather is not over, so you still have time to tackle a couple of indoor projects. Organize some files (where you may be looking for tax-related information anyway!), straighten a closet or desk drawer, clip important items from magazines and newspapers (!!!) and recycle the rest. When the next warm day arrives, you will be ready to enjoy it!

So, welcome the anticipation of spring, folks!

*And remember the
spacing each plant
requires when doing so!
It is an imperative
lesson!*

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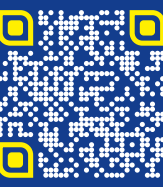
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Scrapping Get Ready...Get Set...Grow!

By Mary C. Ryan

Organic potting soil (aka: dirt) - Check
Plastic clam shells - Check
Seeds - Check
Water - Check
Window sill - Check
Sun - Iffy

My very own 2024 Olympic Gardening Training Camp has officially opened. And as always, my heart yearns for gold. This year, I'm entering a few categories: tomatoes, green beans, garlic, maybe some peas. I don't know. Perhaps cucumbers, although last year's crop turned out looking something like somebody's internal organ. A liver, perhaps. Or gall bladder. They didn't taste too bad, though.

Gardening 2023 was pretty much a complete bust. I had high hopes because I remembered to add new soil to my table top and kept up with the watering pretty well. The tomatoes did okay, but not like 2022. I'm figuring this year there's nowhere to go but up.

If my knowledge of horticulture was graded, I would have flunked out long ago. I probably did my best in kindergarten when we put sunflower seeds in Skippy Cups with yellow or pink crepe paper around the outside. Maybe for Mother's Day. The sunflowers always came up by the time I left school the Friday before the holiday. What happened to them after that has fallen down the rabbit hole of my memory.

But hope always springs eternal. Actually, before hope is the certainty of garlic. You just can't go wrong. Pop it in the ground in October and dig it up in July. Easy as that. It's already showing green and it's only February.

This coming week I'm hoping to get those tomatoes started. If the gods are smiling, I should start to see sprouts in a week or two. The only challenge is to make sure to remember to water them occasionally and since my window sill is above my sink, I'm usually pretty good at that.

I thought I'd also try some marigolds. I bought a huge box of seeds at the Dollar Tree and I hear they're pretty good at keeping bugs at bay. We'll see. Kind of a spotty provenance, I guess.

One year I grew black seeded Simpson lettuce. I think I had a little too heavy hand with the seeds, but I didn't have to worry about what to put on my BLTs all summer.

Whatever happens by July or August or September, it sure is nice to think about growing things when everything out there is sort of gray and brown. But soon whatever sun we're going to get will hang around a little longer (except for the eclipse, of course) and those sprouts will get true leaves and then the race will begin. Will I medal? Only time—and soil and water and sun—will tell.

It Starts with the Soil: Organic Lawn Care Program

Join the Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District and Good Nature Organic Lawn Care on Tuesday, March 12 from 6–7:30 p.m. at the Geauga West Library to learn practical tips and easy steps to take care of your lawn and landscape while minimizing harmful chemicals and pesticides. Starting from the ground up, this program will guide you through practices that build organic matter, improve soil health, and create a chemical-free lawn! Make this the season for a safer lawn for your children, your pets, and your neighborhood. This in-person program is free, but registration is required visiting <https://geagalibrary.libcal.com/event/11228178> or by calling (440) 729-4250.

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Go au Naturel!

By Cecil West

With the planting season almost upon us, I would encourage everyone to consider utilizing natural methods whenever possible to mitigate problems that occur with one's garden and landscape. Organic fertilizers for instance may be a bit more expensive but they work very well. I've used them for a number of years. Weed control is another issue that requires diligence when not using chemicals. Personally, I pull weeds in the garden. I try to do this after a good rain—they come right out! The lawn, however, is a place where I can tolerate a few weeds. My lawn even has crocuses and other flowering "weeds" in it. And if the turf grass is healthy, it will choke out most weeds. So, aerate your lawn regularly and you'd be amazed how well this works!

My main concern here is trying to do my best to keep toxic chemicals out of the water table. Many research articles explain that glyphosate, for instance, can be found in common products we buy like cereals. Even some organic products have traces of glyphosate. Levels vary and proponents of this material insist it is safe to use but lawsuits have been settled to the contrary. I won't use it.

Another chemical that seems to be ubiquitous in our environment is chlormequat which is a quaternary ammonium salt utilized primarily by farmers to aid in harvesting plants like oats. It is a growth regulator and stunts the plants so their stems are stronger. A recent AP article cited a study completed by the Environmental Working Group that found chlormequat in 92% oat-based foods like Cheerios and Quaker Oats. This material has numerous side effects and can even damage one's liver.

Then there is the pest control issue. I personally am a mosquito magnet so they are a bane to me. So, my strategy is based in plant-derived or natural repellents and plants like lemongrass and lavender and marigold. I've used this technique with good results.

The book *Silent Spring* was first published in 1962. Its author, Rachel Carson "sparked a revolution in environmental consciousness" and the truths therein continue to this day to maintain awareness about the dangers the chemical industry poses if unchecked by regulation. To many, Carson is a hero!

Finally, I would recommend that while enjoying the upcoming seasons, do your best to protect our environment if not for yourself for the future generations. This mindset goes hand in hand with reducing your carbon footprint. Your children and grandchildren will thank you!

I wish you all peace and prosperity!

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Start off the new year by making a sound investment for your future...plant a tree! There are countless ways trees positively affect us, our homes and our communities. Whether replacing a tree lost to pest or storm damage or adding new species for beauty and diversity, the simple act of planting trees reduces stormwater runoff while improving water quality, soil health, and property value. To help bring these benefits to your backyard, Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) announces the 2024 Spring Tree Sale! The Tree Sale will be held April 19-20 and offers a streamlined selection of both bareroot seedlings and one-to-three gallon container trees and shrubs. From Blueberry to Elderberry and White Pine to Scarlet Oak, this year's selection is colorful, affordable, and suitable to a wide variety of landscaping needs. Rain barrels are also available for year-round backyard benefits! Consider purchasing tree sale gift certificates for unique, meaningful gifts.

To place an order, please visit our website at geaugaswcd.com. There you will find descriptions of tree species available along with the online ordering link to place orders and make payments. This is the recommended and easiest way to place your order! If unable to use the online ordering option, a form is available to submit with payment.

Order deadline is Thursday, April 4. Orders are filled on a first-come, first-served basis, and Geauga SWCD does not offer guarantees or refunds on purchases. The tree sale pick-up dates are Friday, April 19 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. and Saturday, April 20 from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. at the Geauga County Fairgrounds. Don't delay—order your trees today! Questions? Call 440-834-1122.

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Seeing the Light

By Jeff Griff

There was a feeling of uneasiness in the air.

For the past four years Mary Lynn and I had been enjoying January in Arizona, escaping some of Northeastern Ohio's most dreary, winter weather. Our time in Tucson was coming to an end but that (in itself) was not a significant source of despair.

The weather forecast looked miserable for the last few days of our trip with an atmospheric river contributing to cool and wet conditions for the entire southwest, so again, not a tragedy but annoying nevertheless.

Our real nervousness centered around my father-in-law who was undergoing treatment for Parkinson's Disease. This experimental procedure is not yet approved by the FDA, so he needed to travel to Nicaragua for the treatment. We received assurances that both his procedure and personal security would be in good hands so all we were left to do was hope and pray for the best outcome.

That being said, we decided to alter our vacation plans and set out to visit an out-of-the-way destination we had wanted to see for quite some time.

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is a 330,000-acre park on the California and Mexico border. This corner of Arizona is not only an ideal example of an unspoiled Sonoran Desert environment, but also the northern-most habitat of the Organ Pipe Cactus, a cousin to the more well-known Saguaro. Any of you who ever watched the Coyote/Roadrunner cartoons know the Saguaro Cactus as a tall and robust cactus with a thick main stem and (with age) mostly upward facing "arms." Organ Pipe Cactus are more bush-like with multiple stems emerging from a shared root stock appearing much like the pipes of a church organ. Not only is this park the only place in the United States where this plant naturally grows, it is also a great place for experiencing other desert plants and animals, geology, star gazing and extensive evidence of our human history.

Location, location, location. The isolation of Organ Pipe Monument limits the number of visitors here. Nowhere near any population centers, you really have to want to visit this place so the lousy weather in Tucson made the perfect excuse for the long drive to experience this unique place.

After leaving the city limits, the surroundings quickly turned remote with little if any signs of civilization. Open desert, sand flats and barbed wire fence dominate the landscape, but you are never without a view of distant (many snow-capped) mountains that are ever-present along the Arizona/Mexico border.

After three+ hours of driving we passed through the last small town of Why (can't make this up) and headed to the visitor's center which is only five miles from the Mexican border. We arrived just in time for a ranger's lecture on the survival methods utilized by the Native peoples who have inhabited this area for over 16,000 years. The Hohokam people are the most noteworthy and successful of the ancient southwest cultures and are credited with establishing agriculture on the desert floor of Organ Pipe Cactus Monument. Extensive irrigation channels (still visible today) supported fields of beans, squash, cotton, tobacco and corn. In addition, many native plants provided supplementary sources of food and medicines.

Armed with a greater appreciation for our surroundings, we headed out to the Alamo Canyon trailhead for a hike. Noted as a reliable water source, this deep canyon has remnants of past ranching settlements. As we entered the entrance road, we were greeted by a large sign that warned of "Illegal immigration and smuggling activities". Great... something else to worry about! The good news is that there is nobody else around (ha-ha), so throwing caution to the wind, we proceeded along the rough dirt road to the trailhead. Along the two-mile drive the landscape changed dramatically. As we approached the towering, volcanic mountain canyon the soil and rocks shifted from typical tan to a deep ochre color. The plants became more numerous fully obscuring most of the soil surface. The Organ Pipe Cactus sprouted from everywhere including the smallest cracks in the rock walls of the steep canyon. We set out on our hike along a wide wash with the constant sounds of trickling water so unexpected within these desert surroundings. Obviously, the rain this season has been greater than average and even as we walked a light drizzle dampened our clothes but not our spirits. The desert takes on an entirely different quality during rainfall. The musky smell of the Creosote bush permeates the air. The plants seem to breathe in the moisture turning everything fresh and green. The rocks glisten, the birds sing and for a moment our worries are forgotten.

After the hike, we headed out to the 18-mile Ajo Mountain scenic loop drive to indulge in more of this dynamic landscape. Soon, our van is covered in a spray of red from splashing washboard puddles. Occasionally, I stop to take a picture of the surrounding vistas realizing that there are some things that cannot be conveyed in mere photographs. As we are making the final turn towards the exit, the sun cuts through the clouds in shafts of bright light seemingly targeted on us alone. Still, fat raindrops continue to fall providing a unique sunshower phenomena.

Photographers speak of the "golden hour," the first hour after sunrise and before sunset that is ideal for taking pictures but there is another, less predictable golden hour that is equal to if not superior to morning and evening. When a dark, heavy cloud cover breaks up and the sun is low (mid-morning or afternoon) the light reflects horizontally creating what is most often a short-lived opportunity for unique photographs. The sky is cast in a greenish glow similar to the lighting that occurs during tornado warnings. For as long as I can remember, whenever there was a sunshower, I immediately look for/expect a rainbow. I pulled the van over to the side of the muddy track, grabbed my camera and turned away from the sun to see what I could see. The thousands of cacti surrounding me were ignited in an electric chartreuse against the dark red volcanic mountainsides. The slicing sunlight illuminated the long spines of the cholla making them seem out of focus... fuzzy. I set to capture a shot of a Harris Hawk sitting atop a nearby Juniper when, from behind me, Mary Lynn exclaimed "LOOK!" Directly to the east, a rainbow had emerged from nothing to a full semi-circle of colorful bands seemingly sprouting from a group of Saguaros on one end of the valley to a low rocky peak across the basin floor. As we watched, and without a word between us, a second ring of color arose making a full, double rainbow.

It took me a while, but after some time to absorb what I was seeing I finally managed to take a few pictures before the clouds, once again, closed out the sunshine, the rainbows slowly faded leaving us standing alone... in the rain. That is when, together, we saw the light. Not the light of photographer's dreams but the light of positivity, good fortune and hopefulness. The light of not only a better tomorrow for Mary Lynn's dad...but for all of us.

Now go outside and have fun playing in the... light!