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We want to hear from you!

Send your submissions for the newsletter to yamastgardener@gmail.com by June 1st for the next issue.



Yellowstone Master Gardener



NEWSLETTER

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Eagle Ridge Iris Garden with Delane Langton and Jane Tibbs

by Sheri Fredericksen

Delane Langton was born in Miles City and raised in Glendive. His iris “mentor” was his grandmother. He recalls at about age five or six, sitting on the curb watching her weed a patch of purple, grape-smelling irises. A few years later, his family moved into a new house that had irises planted along the foundation. Bloom time was right at the end of the school year. Delane would cut a few stalks and put them in a wet paper towel and tinfoil vase and deliver them to his teacher.

Years later, Delane acquired some irises from friends which he planted along his driveway. They put on a fantastic and gorgeous show every year. He joined the Big Sky Iris Club in 2000 and went on to serve as president for two terms.

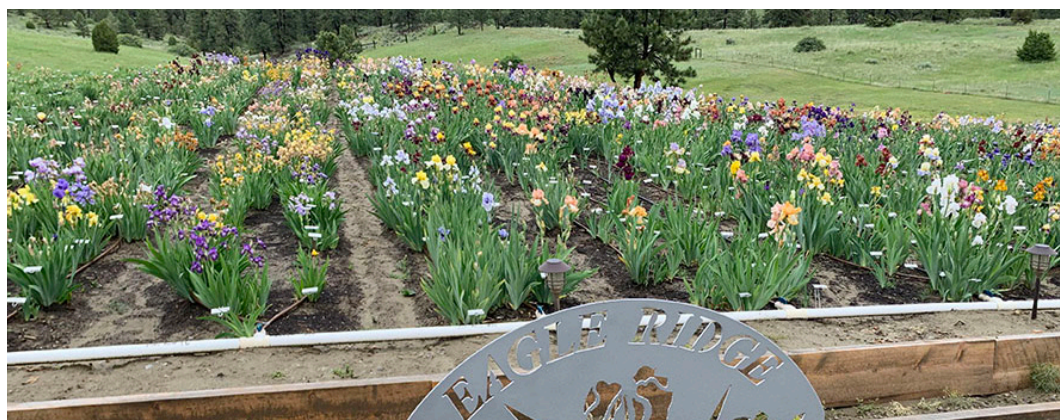


Jane Tibbs (left) and Delane Langton

After a major home renovation in 2003, Delane began the landscape phase of the property, and Eagle Ridge Iris Garden (Eagle Ridge) started to take shape. He bought rhizomes at the local iris club’s stand during farmer’s market, some of which were unnamed and planted in an area called “Orphan Alley”. Those irises were later identified by local commercial iris gardens.

Delane has attended many iris conventions over the last several years with a mission to collect “historic” irises. Many irises have been acquired from the Historic Iris Preservation Society and from local sales like the Billings Farmers Market.

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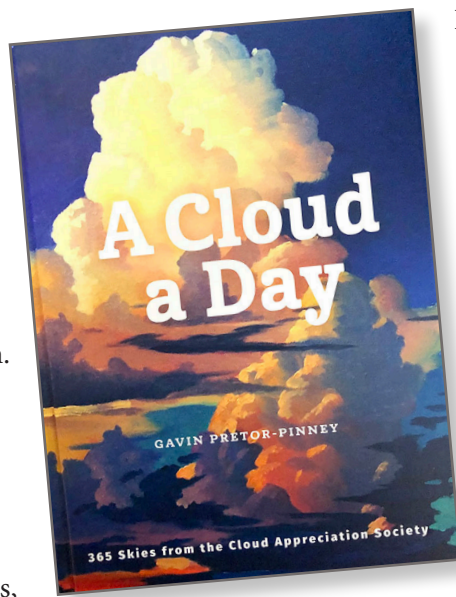
Photos by Delane Langton

A Cloud A Day

by Gavin Pretor-Pinney

I have been fascinated by clouds all my life and loved taking meteorology in college to understand them better and learn names for them. While the scientist in me appreciated gaining some understanding of cloud structure and formative forces as well as their names, mostly I delight in watching clouds on my daily walk, as every day the sky is new, an ever-changing transient sky poem of shapes, textures, layers, and colors.

I spent much time at the ocean as a young person and miss that experience, but the immensity of the sky, its power and its always-transforming daily show of beauty is a good substitute – an ocean of air, larger than life. Cloud watching provides a few moments of peace each day, an engagement with the natural world, a few minutes of meditation. And it's free!



In addition to the calming and meditative aspect of cloud watching, there is a practical dimension for the gardener. A gardener can learn to read the signs in the sky and predict impending storms, providing a chance to protect crops from high winds or hail.

The author founded the Cloud Appreciation Society with like-minded cloud lovers. He has written an informative, fun and beautiful book with 365 entries, mostly photos with some paintings – each illustration identifies the cloud pictured and gives other pertinent information. These entries can help you identify different types of clouds and learn their names. It will surprise you

with cloud phenomena you probably have never seen before. And it will fill you with delight at the beauty and immense variety of clouds captured in these sky photos.

You can read *A Cloud A Day* as a page-a-day experience for a year or you can leave it handy and randomly pick a page to enjoy. I gave this lovely book to several friends the year I discovered it. I hope those of you who are fellow cloud-lovers will give it a try.

EAGLE RIDGE IRIS GARDEN *continued from page 1*

After finding Presby Memorial Iris Gardens in New Jersey on Facebook, he persuaded some ladies to send bags of labeled and No Identification irises in exchange for generous contributions to their cause. That being said, Eagle Ridge's collection of historic irises is growing. There are well over 2,000 historic varieties and Eagle Ridge continues to add 1,300+ varieties to their collection each year.

Delane completed the Master Gardener Level 1 classes approximately 20 years ago. Rather than tracking volunteer hours, he opted to volunteer at Zoo MT and DanWalt Gardens as time allowed. Delane and his partner, Jane Tibbs, retired in 2017 and began to sell irises. This has been a labor of love and they want to keep it that way. They continue to grow, collect, and hoard all classes of irises. In the last few years, hybridizing has become a

real interest. Their 2018 crosses will be blooming this year and it will be very interesting and exciting to see what shows up.

The irises begin blooming around the end of March and continue well into November.

Eagle Ridge's five-to-10-year plan includes a transition to hybridizing their own irises. They have been selling irises nationally for about eight years.

The National American Iris Society Convention will be held in Billings this year from June 2–7th. The focus of the convention will be to share and learn about various aspects of



irises. Whether you are a gardener or serious iris enthusiast, there will be a variety of programs and tours of interest open to the public during the convention. For more information about the conference, please check out www.bigskyirisclub.com for information on programs and tours, including the Eagle Ridge tour.

Fun fact: If you've ever wondered who planted those pretty iris blooming along airport road, it was initially a Girl Scouts project, then the Big Sky Iris Club took it over.

Seed Library Dates

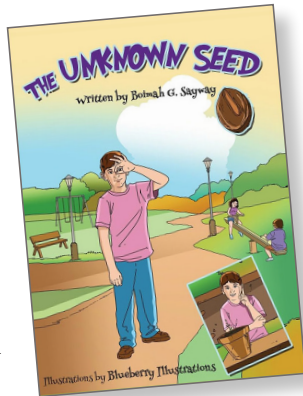
by Anthony Sammartano

APRIL: Garden Soil Health Workshop

Creating and maintaining healthy garden soil is crucial to the success of our gardens. Join Montana State University's Soil Fertility Specialist, Dr. Clain Jones, for a presentation on soil health. Learn about what makes up healthy garden soil, and the steps you can make to create healthy garden soil at home. This free presentation will be held in the Community Room of the Billings Public Library on Wednesday, April 9th, from 1–2pm.

MAY: The Unknown Seed – A Friday Night Fun Program! (Kids Program)

Invasive weeds are an ever-present issue for Montana. They displace desirable plants, increase soil erosion, and can cause physical harm to our bodies. Join Yellowstone County Weed District's Education Specialist, Caleb Music, for a fun interactive kid's event to learn how invasive weeds interact in nature. Participants will read the book, *The Unknown Seed*, and act out each phase of the seed's life. Expect to get out of your seats and ready to move about and play! This free kid's activity is a part of the Billings Public Library's Friday Night Fun program on Friday, May 9th. The program will run from 5:30–7:30pm.



JUNE: Let's Talk About Bugs

The good, the bad, and the ugly. All varieties of bugs can be found in our gardens, but knowing which ones are truly bad is the key to figuring out the best treatment options. Visit with the Montana State University's Insect Diagnostician, Chloe Rice, at the Gainan's Heights Flowers Garden and Patio store to learn more about the good and bad bugs in our gardens, how tell them apart, and the best ways to treat the bad bugs. Insect displays will be on hand for participants to view the more elusive bugs that frequent our gardens. This free class will be held on Saturday, June 7th at Gainan's Heights Flowers Garden and Patio store (810 Bench Blvd.) and will start at 10am. Pre-registration is encouraged, please call 406.248.5029 to reserve a seat.

AUGUST: Basics of Seed Saving

Learn how to collect, save, and store heirloom vegetable and native plant seeds with Associate Professor Megan Poulette. We'll discuss the plant life cycle, hybrids vs. heirlooms, harvesting techniques, and germination tricks for the next



growing season. Saving seeds is a great way to help ensure you continue to have a bountiful harvest year after year. Megan Poulette is an Associate Professor of Botany and Environmental Science at Rocky Mountain College. After a stint in commercial horticulture in Colorado, she earned her MS in Plant and Soil Science and a PhD in Biology at the University of Kentucky. Megan is a life-long gardener and member of the St Andrews Community Garden here in Billings. She and her students grow vegetable plants every spring for members of the Rocky Community and Partners in Billings. This event will be held at the Billings Public Library on August 20th, 5:30–6:30pm.

News Flash: Just In Time For Arbor Day

by Laura Estes

The Yellowstone Arboretum and ZooMontana Botanical Park have been accepted as new members in Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) <https://www.bgci.org/>. This prestigious organization represents botanical gardens worldwide and will be a valuable source for future networking, research, grant opportunities and training. The BGCI is anxious to begin membership as our gardens will be the first and only member of BGCI in Montana! To volunteer at the Arboretum contact Scott at billingsbotanical@gmail.com; or at the Botanic Garden at <https://www.zoomontana.org/botanical-garden>

Turf To Trees

by Ann McKean

You will be hearing more about this fabulous summer workshop in the months to come from Anthony Sammartano and Sarah Eilers, but please do consider saving time this summer to head to Bozeman for this full day learning experience. Whether you go alone, or carpool with three friends, you will not regret making the effort to go and hear the wonderful and informative speakers. It's also a rare opportunity to meet Master Gardeners from other parts of the state. Don't miss it!

The Edible Flower Garden

by Kathy Brown

As gardeners, we are familiar with growing flowers for their cheerful beauty and their importance in attracting pollinators. I think most of us do not often think of them as food. But flowers have been used by cooks for centuries and can be an addition to your fruits and vegetables as a source of colorful and tasty ingredients for your kitchen.

For many years I have enjoyed adding nasturtium and Johnny Jump-up petals to my salads. After reading this book, I am now aware of many more flowers I can harvest, for example daylily petals and buds, hollyhock petals, and bergamot petals and leaves.

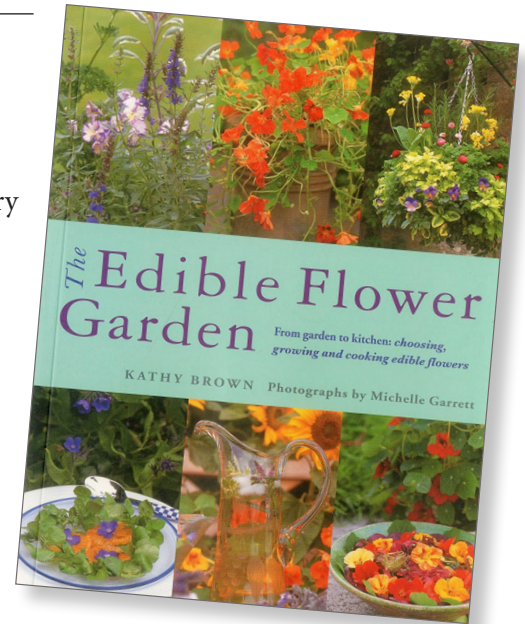
The author begins with a short, interesting history of flowers in kitchens and cookbooks dating back over a thousand years. Ms. Brown then describes how to gather and process petals and other plant parts

and has a detailed section on culinary uses in butters, in oils, as candied flowers, in drinks, and in salads. An interesting recipe accompanies each of these descriptions.

Next is a description of how to sow plant partners in containers for both beauty and for culinary use. Examples are chives and parsley, calendula and parsley, and scented geraniums and lemon verbena.

There is a brief chapter on how to propagate the flowering plants, by growing seeds in pots, by cuttings, in the ground, and through controlled self-seeding.

And lastly there is an extensive directory of 47 plants with a brief description, a photograph of the plant, site and propagation information, culinary uses, and flower dissection instructions.



Throughout the book there are beautiful and profuse photographic illustrations of both plants and the results of recipes (like a stunning cake with candied roses) that are a delight to the eye and a temptation to the palate. This is an excellent reference book for the gardener who wishes to go beyond vegetables and fruits and explore the world of edible flowers.

Reasons To Plant Natives For A Resilient Garden

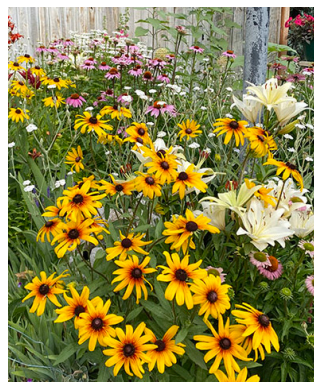
by Ann McKean

As our weather becomes more erratic and extreme, natives are a great choice for a resilient garden. Because they evolved here, they thrive in our soil and are adapted to our harsh climate.

Natives are drought tolerant, but their deep taproots help hold the soil in flooding rain. They can tolerate late spring freezes and sudden fall temperature plunges.

Non-natives will always be more stressed and require more intervention than natives and natives require much less annual maintenance from the busy gardener.

Natives don't need any fertilizers or pesticides. They can take care of themselves. They feed our beautiful pollinators, our beneficial insects and our indigenous



wildlife. When we plant more natives, we are helping nature survive. Without native plants, we will continue to see population declines and diminishing diversity in our native fauna.

Some easy natives to include in your plantings are the many varieties of penstemon and echinacea, gaillardia, yucca, and any of the native sages. Native grasses like switchgrass (*Panicum*) offer a beautiful contrast in texture and can make a lovely undemanding addition to your garden.

Natives are beautiful and just look 'right' in any garden, echoing the beauty of our wild lands around us. As you are heading out to the garden this season, remember to add some native plants to your collection!

Veggies For A Resilient Montana

by Ann McKean

Montana has always had an unforgiving climate that makes it a real challenge to have a vegetable garden and unfortunately, it's becoming more unpredictable every year. Our high pH, compacted soil, high winds and short growing season, combined with inconsistent rainfall, the very real risk of killing hail, cool nights and blistering days all test even the most intrepid and experienced gardener. Fortunately, some vegetables are definitely easier to grow than others.

Site planning and soil testing are a great place to start, but once you have your beds ready, what to plant? Consider the days to maturity and whether the vegetable is hardy, half hardy or tender. For example, the window of actual harvest is pretty short for a tender cantaloupe that takes 120 days to reach maturity, so that will take some planning and some luck. Whether experienced or inexperienced, never be afraid to try something if you like the challenge. But if you want slightly more certainty, choose vegetables that are tougher and more forgiving and take the time to plan and prep.



First on the no-brainer list, rhubarb is technically a vegetable, grows like a weed here and is tolerant of drier conditions. Radishes, peas and spring lettuce are good dependable early producers that take advantage of the cooler wetter weather of spring.



Orach and chard can be harvested from spring to summer. Orach will cheerily self-sow. Asparagus, a perennial, requires patience to get established, but can grow well. Summer squash yields bumper crops that keep on coming, and though more needy, tomatoes are irresistible and completely doable; consistent water is crucial for best results.



Potatoes and beets like our soil. Remember to **always** use Montana Certified Seed Potatoes to avoid the introduction of diseases.

Carrots (depending on the variety of carrot and your soil preparation) can be outstanding and can be harvested even after the first frost. Shorter length carrots are better suited to more compacted soil.



Plant garlic in the fall for a mid to late summer harvest. Easy fall crops include winter squash and pumpkins, kale, onions and dried beans. All of the pulses, like dried beans and lentils, are especially well suited to our area and are easy to grow. Amaranth, too, thrives with neglect, and the leaves, flowers, and seeds can all be eaten.

Even in challenging conditions, many herbs are easy to grow, including fennel (be careful not to let it go to seed!) dill (same), oregano (same), and parsley. Chives, tarragon, thyme and mint (be careful what you wish for!) will winter in the garden, although thyme can be inconsistent. Many edible flowers are also easy to grow and make great companion plants.

Remember to practice crop rotation to maintain soil fertility and disrupt pest and disease cycles.

Check the Extension website for a wealth of detailed information and ask your fellow master gardeners what grows well for them. We can learn so much from each other.



Spring Salad

Every year it is exciting to plan the new garden, order seeds, and look forward to eating vegetables picked fresh right from the ground or plant. While waiting in anticipation for the carrots and tomatoes and kale and zucchinis, there is a period where early greens fill in the desire to harvest from the garden. These early leafy greens can be combined in a delicious spring salad.

Here are some possibilities for your early spring salad:

Orach leaves: These are the earliest green leaves I pick from the garden. They can be picked continuously until the plant gets tall and the leaves large and somewhat bitter. They can still be eaten but are better cooked at that point. The friend who originally gave me orach seeds (which I have never had to replant as this plant is a champion at self-seeding) told me the pioneers used orach as their first fresh greens after the long winter. Orach has a slightly spicy flavor to it. The leaves can be chartreuse green or burgundy red, adding color as well as taste to the salad.



Thinnings from cool-weather

crops: Early lettuce, kale, and spinach thinnings can be added to salads.



Dandelions:

Both the leaves and the flower petals are edible (the

roots can be roasted and used to make tea). Pick the leaves before the plant blooms to avoid bitterness. (Note: Swanky Roots periodically sells dandelion leaves.)



Violets and violas:

Johhny Jump-ups and violets bloom fairly early and the petals are delicious. Johhny Jump-up petals are a little spicy.



Chives: My chives grow pretty early in the spring and can be chopped for salads. Later when the plants bloom the flower petals are edible.



Peas: One of my favorites from the garden is fresh peas. I usually stand out in the garden and eat them right there! Those that make it to the house are good fresh in salads or cooked for other dishes. Pea tendrils are also edible.



Calendula: Pot marigold or calendula petals are tasty in dishes, including salads. Calendula is another excellent self-seeder, so once they start blooming in late spring/



early summer there will be plenty of flowers available.

The flavors of these early leaves and flowers are delicate so I use a homemade oil and vinegar dressing. I make mine with safflower or sunflower oil, olive oil, apple cider vinegar, and agave syrup, seasoned with paprika, granulated garlic, and salt.

Yellowstone County Master Gardener Newsletter MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Yellowstone County Master Gardener newsletter is to "educate and inform," not to advocate or persuade. The Newsletter Editorial Board takes no position endorsing or opposing, approving or disapproving, any of the assertions or arguments in the contributed information. Information submitted to the newsletter is for your interest only.

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Ants In Montana

by Ann McKean

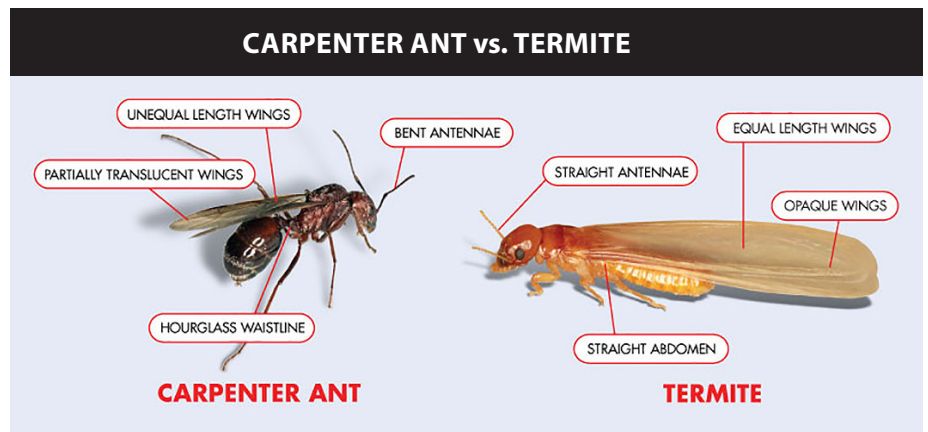
Classified in the order Hymenoptera, ants are found everywhere on the planet except in the most extreme environments. Scientists estimate that there are 20 quadrillion ants on earth. Fascinating animals, ants are social insects and live in large colonies where they work together as a group. Some ant colonies even rescue wounded ants and nurse them back to health.

As with bees and wasps, there are queens (the egg layers and the largest ant in the colony), drones (males that reproduce), and workers (females that never reproduce and can range in size depending on their role in the colony and can carry up to fifty times their own body weight). The presence of wings indicates queens or drones; workers never have wings. The workers build the nest, nurse the young, guard the nest and forage for food.

Ants are omnivorous and can hunt, forage and farm; leafcutter ants use leaf scraps to grow and harvest a fungus. Colonies can be found below ground (where they help aerate the soil), in mounds at ground level (don't poke those!) or in trees. Most ants will bite to defend their colonies. Some ants sting, and formica ants spray formic acid.

Sometimes confused with termites, ants can be identified by their bent antennae and their narrow waist. Ants can be blonde, red or black, smooth or hairy, and range in size from a millimeter up to an inch. The carpenter ant, the largest ant in Montana ranges from ¼ to ½ inch long. The beautiful velvet ant is, in fact, not an ant but a wasp and the females can inflict a very painful sting. Not typically aggressive, they may even make a squeak to frighten you before they resort to more painful tactics.

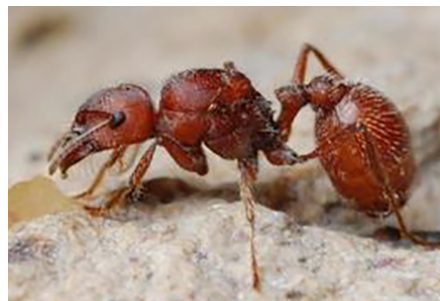
The most well-known ants found in Montana are the carpenter, field, pavement, and western harvester. Our largest species, the carpenter ant, which can measure up to a half inch long, is the most notorious because of the damage they can do to structures. Misunderstood,



Carpenter ant



Pavement ant



Western harvester ant

Images courtesy of www.forestryimages.org

they do not eat wood, but are opportunistically attracted to moist and already rotting wood because it is the perfect environment to build their nests. They chew the rotting wood and dispose of the sawdust to make galleries and tunnels where they raise their young. They are most active at night and move their eggs frequently to keep them in the most ideal conditions. They are often seen foraging in the garden for insect prey and the sweet honeydew from aphids, or scouting for new nest sites in their natural habitat of old and rotting trees where they perform the valuable role of decomposers in the ecosystem. They do not attack living wood, so if you see carpenter ants going into a tree (or your house), that's probably a sign that there is rotting wood there. The best way to avoid carpenter ants in your structures is to remove plant material that is touching the building, seal cracks and openings and eliminate the source of any moisture or rot that is getting into the structure.

While it can be frustrating for gardeners to have to work around ants in their gardens, ants provide valuable ecosystem services through aeration of soils, seed dispersal, cleanup and decomposition, predation of pesky insects and as a food source for other animals. If you have ants, you probably have a healthy garden.

When I was a little girl, I would cry if someone stepped on an ant. I don't cry anymore, but I still avoid stepping on them. Although irritating when they invade or damage our personal space, ants are invaluable to a healthy ecosystem.

Courtesy of animalia-life.club

Taste The Agri-Culture

by Laura Estes

Locally grown food has many benefits, among them supporting our local economy, encouraging young farmers and providing fresh, delicious and nutritious food. It also requires fewer miles to transport, benefitting the environment.



The Greater Billings Local Food Coalition assessed the local food system and identified a key need: local producers and food businesses require more local buyers to thrive! They created Taste the Agri-Culture to raise awareness of the vital role our local food system plays. Taste the Agri-Culture is like a scavenger hunt to explore Billings' local food and have fun.

It features 12 Billings businesses that sell/distribute local food:

- **Agri Organics:** custom-blended topsoil amendments and STA Certified compost for homeowners and commercial contractors in Billings and the area • <https://www.agriorganics.org/> or call 406.855.1347



- **Frae Everyday Goods:** a thoughtfully sourced corner store at 115 Shiloh, Suite 1, featuring local food and sustainable living goods. Check the fridge for fresh local food picks restocked every Friday. Shop online and sign up for the newsletter at <https://store.shopfrae.com/>



- **Grandpas Fun Farm:** believes true happiness comes from watching your crops ripen in the field as your children grow tall in the sun • <https://www.grandpasfarmmt.com/>

- **Healthy By Design Gardeners' Market:** Thursdays, 4–6pm, from the second week of June through the first week in October. Fresh, affordable, local-grown food. All are welcome! <https://www.healthybydesignyellowstone.org/what-we-do/current-initiatives/gardeners-market/>



- **Let's Get Fresh Food Truck:** focused on locally grown food, even using food from their own garden. Follow them at facebook. [com/letsgetfreshfoodtruck](https://www.facebook.com/letsgetfreshfoodtruck)

- **Montana Prime Meats:** in the Heights, features all natural beef raised on a family ranch. Frozen beef cuts available year round. Local delivery available. <https://www.montanaprimemeats.com/>



- **The Marble Table:** mouth-watering food, great customer service and a touch of home in downtown Billings, they emphasize serving great quality local meat and produce. <https://www.themarbletablemt.com/>



- **Swanky Roots:** grows fresh, delicious leafy greens in their sustainable aquaponics greenhouse. Look for them at Albertsons, Town and Country, several restaurants and at their storefront. <https://www.swankyroots.com/>



- **Sweetwater Café:** offers local delights including fresh Seconde pasta. Daily specials, catering, and locally roasted coffee. Menu at <https://sweetwater-cafe.square.site/>

- **Town & Country:** locally-decided, employee owned grocery store that connects people with their communities through food, at 1603 Grand. <https://www.tncfoods.com/>

- **Yellowstone Valley Food Hub:** year-round local grower's cooperative with 50+ vendors. Order online for pick-up (six convenient locations) or delivery <https://www.yvfoodhub.com/>. Shop in person Fridays from 10am–3pm, 2115 Lampman Drive Ste. A.



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Introduction To Xeriscaping

by Anthony Sammartano

During a drought in the early 1980s, a planner with the Denver Water Department was thinking creatively and coined the term “xeriscape” to help describe functional and beautiful landscaped areas that require less water. Xeriscaping doesn’t describe a specific design, but instead describes actions that conserve water. Xeriscaping is broken into three major components: 1. Wise Water Usage, 2. Landscape Considerations, and 3. Plant Selection.

Wise Water Usage’s end goal is to minimize the amount of water that

is wasted in trying to keep plants healthy. This looks like selecting appropriate irrigation systems (drip vs. flood), and timing of irrigation. It is

wise to water in the early morning to minimize water loss due to evaporation, and this incidentally reduces the risk of plant diseases. It is important to do regular checks on your irrigation system to ensure all leaks and breaks are discovered and repaired, and that the irrigation



system is calibrated. Making sure your sprinklers are watering plants and not sidewalks go a long way in Wise Water Usage.

Landscape Considerations means taking the topography of the growing space into consideration. If you have a site that has a south and west facing exposure, it is important to note that plants put here will have higher water demands than plants put into north or eastern exposures. The sloping of sites should be considered, as steeper slopes will increase the runoff.

Hardscaping, such as terracing, and installing drip irrigation systems may reduce water waste, but it is best to do what is practical for yourself and your landscape.

Last is **Plant Selection**. One could waste time, water, and money on plants not

adapted to the aridness of our region. By selecting plants that are suited for our climate and can survive in your landscape’s soil type, you are setting your landscape up for success. Native plants and their cultivars are great options, and if you are looking for ideas and inspiration for plants,



please reach out to me and I will share the various xeriscape plant lists I have accumulated.

If you are someone who enjoys

continued on page 11



EXTENSION

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Master Gardener Education

by Laura Estes

Cultivating Healthy Plants Webinar Series

Anthony Sammartano (Yellowstone County Extension) and MSU Extension send notices on events taking place to increase our gardening skills so we can in turn share that knowledge with friends and neighbors. But I find they often occur on days when I have conflicts. **Cultivating Healthy Plants** comes to the rescue with an inexpensive and time-efficient way to learn. They also offer continuing education credits (CEUs) to remain a Master Gardener in good standing (four CEUs per year are required).

Presentations are directed toward homeowners, commercial growers, extension/educators, and state/federal agencies in varying degrees depending on the topic. One presentation I enjoyed last year was *Turf Grass that Gives More Than it Takes*. My neighbors have many misconceptions about their lawns, from how useless they are to the high maintenance required for a “good” lawn. Brief and accessible information can be hard to find. Turf scientist Kelly Copp from Utah State outlined not only some surprising turf benefits, but how to make it an ecological choice in the landscape. She also referenced further resources for evaluating the efficiency of irrigation systems and how to transition to drought tolerant varieties, all in a half-hour video.

This Integrated Pest Management webinar series is operated by University of Idaho Extension, Utah State University Extension, University of Nevada – Reno Extension, and Montana State University Extension. Their mission is “to empower everyone in our community to be thoughtful stewards of our local ecosystems. Ecological preservation begins in our own backyard...” Guest educators, scientists and faculty give presentations in their area of expertise. You can register for the next offering here: <https://www.cultivatinghealthyplants.org/>.

Workshops are usually recorded and some past ones are available at: <https://www.montana.edu/extension/ipm/resources/multimedia/index.html>

And the YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@CultivatingHealthyPlants>

I’m looking forward to the 2025 offerings as a quick break from gardening in those



hot afternoons ahead. Note: if you aren’t receiving emails from Anthony or the MSU Extension Office, contact them to be included.

Share Your Expertise in a Billings Community Garden!

Community gardens are established in urban/suburban areas where space for individual gardens may be limited. They contribute to food security by increasing access to fresh, affordable produce. They

also offer community and hands-on education:

gardening and nutrition tips, supplying local food networks, and encouraging environmental stewardship. Billings has several active community gardens where you may want to consider contributing your time:

Amend Park Community Garden, NE corner of Amend Park near South Billings Blvd. • <https://www.billingsparks.org/support/outreach/amend-park-community-garden/>. Rent a plot with “Apply Here” (keyword search “garden”) or volunteer for a special project (grapevines need some TLC) by contacting Jake at 406.657.8308.

Songbird Community Garden, 1559 Songbird Drive • They are in the last year of a two-year AARP grant project to improve their Gifting Garden and Gleaning Orchard. The goal is to improve and increase their donations to local food pantries. Volunteers are needed to help plant and maintain the designated garden plots and orchard. Contact them at songbirdgarden59101@gmail.com.

HomeFront Community Gardens (Housing Authority of Billings) • <https://homefrontpartners.org/family-and-resident-services/community-gardens/>

St. Andrew Community Garden, 180 24th Street West • Find out more by contacting the St. Andrew Office at 406-656-9256 and <https://standrewbillings.org/pages/connect.html>. They could use some volunteers to help building the

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St. Andrew Community Garden

TASTE THE AGRI-CULTURE *continued from page 8*

- **Zest Kitchen + cookware:** sweet family story turned local food store that shares in all things cooking. Join a community food class or pickup your weekly YVFH order. <https://zestbillings.com/>

Other Information

Abundant Montana, a program of Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO), is a statewide hub and marketing tool for local food. They annually publish the Abundant Montana Local Food Guide, available at many locations around Billings (find a location near you on their website). It is a directory to local food as well as offering inspiring stories, recipes and news about local food events. Find out more at <https://abundantmontana.com/> and hello@abundantmontana.com.


Taste The Agri-Culture Scavenger Hunt: Yellowstone County Extension Horticulture Agent, Anthony Sammartano, offered Master Gardeners two ways to earn four continuing education credits (CEUs) by participating.

1. Snap a photo of what you love at each of the 12 stops and post it on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tastetheagriculture>.

or

2. Visit two of the businesses, find someone who is familiar with Taste the Agri-Culture and ask questions (see below). Then share the answers with Anthony via email or dropped off at the Extension office.

You will get to know the people behind your meals, hear their stories, and appreciate the dedication in every bite.



TASTE THE AGRI-CULTURE
BILLINGS, MT

SCAVENGER HUNT QUESTIONS

Business: _____

Person Contacted: _____

1. How far should food travel to be considered local?
2. How can a local food system contribute to economic development within a community?
3. How can local food systems address food insecurity issues?
4. How can local food systems mitigate environmental impacts related to land use and water management?
5. How can consumer education be utilized to increase demand for locally grown food?

Return to Anthony Sammartano
anthony.sammartano@montana.edu

INTRODUCTION TO XERISCAPING *continued from page 9*



their lawn, you can still be included in the xeriscaping conversation. Using fine fescues instead of Kentucky Bluegrass would maintain a healthy green lawn that is better adapted to our climate. Regardless of what grass type you select, it is important to use your water effectively. Keep your lawn mowed to a height around 3 inches, and water deeply and infrequently. This watering style helps build strong, deep roots, which creates a tougher, drought resilient lawn. If you find yourself dealing with a site that is intolerable for lawn grasses, please consider groundcovers! Creeping juniper or creeping thyme are wonderful at covering bare soil, and are tolerant to full shade, poor soils, and steep slopes!

Xeriscaping is all about being water wise! Any way to reduce water usage helps add a drop in the bucket that may come in handy on a dry year.

MASTER GARDENER EDUCATION *continued from page 10*

arbor over the labyrinth this summer and a shelter for the no-till, regenerative garden beds.

Hope Center Church Garden is searching for a new coordinator. Contact Pastor Aidan Handall at 406.294.4673.

Another resource and volunteer opportunity is the **Magic City Community Gardens Coalition** (MCCGC), established in 2019-2020 by VISTA volunteer Jackie Patten, to coordinate resources, workshops, donations and general gardening knowledge among community gardening organizations. The Association was instrumental in developing and is partnered with the Billings Community Seed Library (located in the Parmly Library, see article <http://www.ycmgmt.com/newsltr/Jan-Mar25.pdf>). • Magic City Community Gardens Coalition: <https://mccgbillings.wordpress.com/> or on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/MagicCityCommunityGardens/>

Meet The Metra Gardens

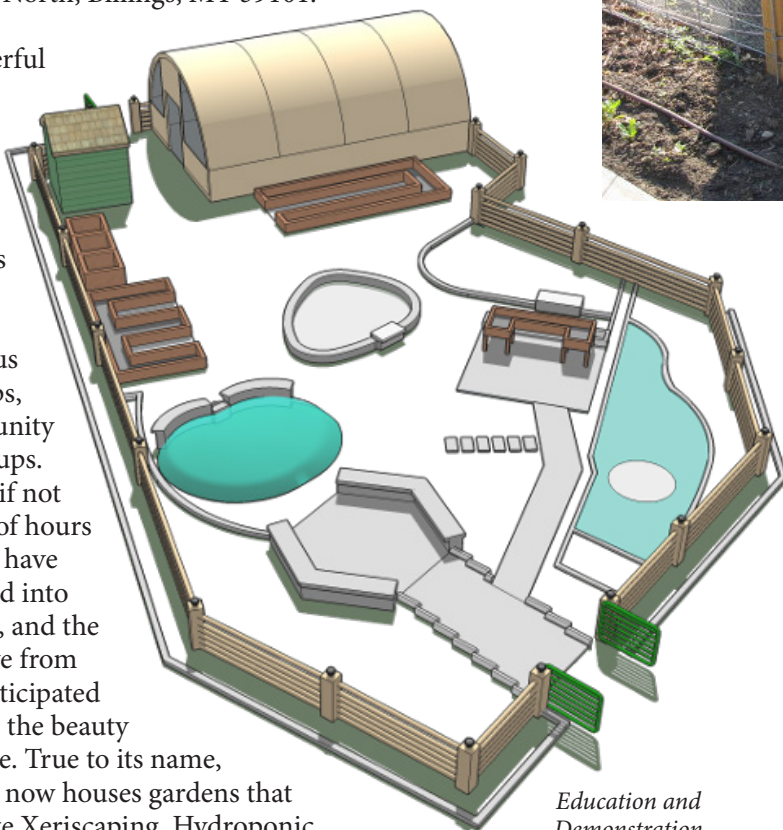
by Anthony Sammartano

Tucked into the south-western corner of the Metra Park grounds, next to the N.I.L.E building, is the Master Gardener Education and Demonstration Garden. If you care to pay this garden a visit, which I highly encourage, use this address when searching for directions: 1500, 308 6th Avenue North, Billings, MT 59101.

This wonderful garden was created by many of you who are reading this newsletter, volunteers from various Scout troops, and community service groups. Hundreds, if not thousands of hours and dollars have been poured into this garden, and the labor of love from all who participated is shown in the beauty of this space. True to its name, this garden now houses gardens that demonstrate Xeriscaping, Hydroponic Gardening, Native Plant Gardening, experimental fruit trees, Vermicompost, and Pollinator Gardens. New garden ideas are always being tested out in this space, and I invite you to visit this garden area to see what is possible when it comes to gardening. Who knows, inspiration may strike and you may discover something new to try in your own garden!

The garden managers for the Education and Demonstration Garden are looking for some extra help this season. If you would like to join myself and other Master Gardeners in gaining some volunteer hours and helping to educate the public (and ourselves), please reach out to me at anthony.sammartano@montana.edu to inquire about volunteer opportunities this season.

I also want to take an opportunity to talk about the Square Foot Garden. This garden is located across the parking lot from the Master Gardener Education and Demonstration Garden at the Metra Park grounds. This garden area served as a demonstration garden to showcase the ability



Education and Demonstration Garden layout

to garden effectively with limited space. By utilizing a smaller space, gardeners can grow more effectively, and utilize less resources (mulch, fertilizer, and water) when gardening.

Unfortunately, this garden space has gone without a garden manager for the last two years, and it had started to fall into disrepair. But have no fear, Bob Wicks and Merita Murdock are here! This year, Bob and Merita will be helping to manage and coordinate the projects at the Square Foot Garden, but they can't do it alone. If you are interested in helping to breathe new life back into this garden space, please reach out to Bob Wicks (bobwix@hotmail.com) to join the team.



Volunteers in the Demonstration Garden



The former Square Foot Garden



Growing in the Square Foot Garden