

Winnebago County Master Gardeners

Newsletter

September 2018

Mission Statement

Our purpose is to provide horticultural education, community service and environmental stewardship for our community in affiliation with the University of Wisconsin Extension Program.

“When the flower blossoms, the bee will come.”



Butterfly Garden, picture by Kim Willman

What am I?

By Jane Kuhn

I am a native, herbaceous, perennial bunchgrass growing in zones 3-9 with leaves that curve gracefully outward forming large, round tufts which are one to three feet tall. I grow in a wide range of soils, preferring dry soil in full sun. My leaves range in color from a rich green in summer to a golden rust in fall. My flowers with pink and brown tints bloom in late summer to early fall and are most noted for their unique fragrance described as having the vague scent of fresh popcorn, cilantro or sunflower seeds. I am low maintenance and drought tolerant.

I am difficult to establish by direct seeding. Dividing my rootball or transplanting greenhouse grown seedlings are more effective methods of establishing my plant. I am best in prairies, native plant gardens, in large rock gardens, wild areas or slopes and rain gardens. I have no serious insect or disease problems and am tolerant of deer and black walnuts.

WCMGA Contacts

Check your membership guide for contact information.

Co-Presidents: Linda Loker & Kathy Schultz

Co-Vice Presidents: Nancy Karuhn & Eric Kropp

Secretary: Ann Abraham

Treasurer: Joni Pagel

Advisor: Kimberly Miller

Newsletter Compilation: Anne Murphy



Butterfly Garden, picture by Kim Willman

Letter from your Presidents: Linda Loker & Kathy Schultz

"But now in September the garden has cooled, and with it my possessiveness. The sun warms my back instead of beating on my head ... The harvest has dwindled, and I have grown apart from the intense midsummer relationship that brought it on."

[Robert Finch](#)

Here we are in the fall of the year - are we ever going to be rid of the Japanese beetles...the slugs tearing up our hostas...and could we please have some rain?! Hopefully at this writing, our landscape is a little more hydrated! But, the color is still beautiful, isn't it? And it is only going to become more beautiful with fall in the air. The trees should put on a great show this year with the dry summer season we have had!

We finished up our summer garden walks by visiting the Butterfly Gardens at Miravida Living project in August. Thank you to all who have made this a favorite outside area for the residents to enjoy!

Two informational meetings were held in August for any potential WCMG trainees for Level 1 Basic Training. The turnout was good with approximately 15 in attendance. We will be seeing our new trainees at our September meeting as they will be asked to join us for our September business meeting. Level 1 training will begin September 11 and starts at 9:30 AM this year. Thank you **Jan Wetterau-Houge** for assisting with this class. Jan sent out an email to all project leads to sign up for a presentation at a Level 1 training session so that our new trainees will have a better understanding about our projects - and thank you for taking the time to do this.

State and local dues were due on September 1, however you will have an opportunity to submit your fees at the business meeting on Sept 11. \$30 will cover state and local fees.

This is the time of year when we begin our officer election process. Elections will be held at the November 13 meeting. The 2019 year positions to be filled are vice president(s), secretary and two board members. We are a strong and active organization in this state because of our leadership and involvement. As a board member, we learn the inner workings of the organization which gives us a better understanding. Also, the hours spent serving in this capacity count as volunteer hours toward certification. Descriptions of each of the above roles will be shared at our upcoming business meetings. Please consider serving in one of these roles.

This is also a time of the year when project members can consider obtaining a grant from the state to enhance your project. If there is something special that you would like to do in your project, and need additional funds that the beneficiary cannot provide, please ask our state reps, **Deb Voyles** and **Ed Dombrowski**, or a board member for details.

Our speaker for our business meeting in September is Patrick Lake, Soil Conservationist from National Resources Conservation Service. He will talk to us on soil health and no-till gardening. This is most likely your first chance to start the education hours for the year!

See you all soon!

Kathy and Linda

Ask a Plant Health Advisor



“These photos are of cucumber, bean, and tomato plants. I’m guessing the cucumber is powdery mildew and water stress, but any ideas about the other two? I’m not sure how prolific the damage is or if these are isolated leaves. These are the only photos that I was sent. Thanks! The client said that they are being grown in an [‘Earth Box’](#) which was filled with new potting mix and dolomite. The cucumber is in its own container but with the same potting mix.”

Find the answer later in the newsletter.



Butterfly Garden Walk, picture by Kim Willman

A “Military Invasion” Hits Paulson Road

By Valerie Stabenow

In the past 3 weeks, not only our property, but properties north of us on Paulson Road and Lasley Shore Road and Sunset Trail, were the subjects of an invasion of stationary and flying pests. I also took a call on the Hort Helpline from a nearby property owner with identical concerns.

Prior to the week of July 23rd, I noticed occasional hard black ‘dots’ stuck to my black post lantern, its glass and also on our beige/tan garage doors. They came off the doors with a deck brush; the post lamp required wetting and then a brush removal. Then, during that week of July, we were invaded! The east side of our garage, the white fascia and trim and 2 overhead doors, was plastered with these small black dots. Our boathouse, with a white overhead door and white trim, was covered in black splotches. Dismayed, Allen, my husband and fellow MG, considered the best approach to removal. I researched what these ‘things’ were on line and found that they are commonly referred to as “[Artillery Fungus](#)” and/or “Shotgun Fungus” since the fungus actually shoots the little black balls on to white/light colored surfaces. Penn State University had a page devoted to self-reported removal methods, but none of them were possibilities for us, with a 23 ft roof peak to clean off!

(Keep on reading, I promise I’ll fill in the “science” portion of what this fungus is and how it is vectored!)

It had rained the night before, and I believe that is what turned the black dots on the west facing boathouse into the black splotches. We started with the boathouse, since at that time it was not in direct sunlight. Because I had used the wetting-prior-to-removal system successfully on the post lamp, we started with that. Allen soaked the siding, fascia and door with warm (house) water with a hose and hose-end sprayer, while I was getting the power washer set up. Careful and patient spraying with the power washer, with repeated passes over the affected areas removed these splotches. After several hours of work, we were satisfied with our cleaning efforts. Then it was on to the task of our house garage, with its 23ft peak roof!

Again, we took advantage of waiting until there was no direct sun on that east side of the garage (early afternoon). Because the prior rain had not turned these dots into splotches, we were going to attack the little black dots. Allen began soaking the siding, doors and trim from ground level. I followed with the power washer. So far, so good. Same methodology, repeatedly soak, then power wash with careful, patient and repeated passes over the affected areas. That was OK when we could work from the ground or from our safety ladder, but the upper areas of the garage required me to work higher up. We used the bed of our pickup as a platform and set the safety ladder (AKA Little Giant) in the bed. Once at the safest and highest position on the ladder, I was able to reach the peak of the garage with the power washer. Good thing it wasn’t a cold day, as we were both pretty soaked from the water spray.

By late afternoon, we had cleaned off the last of the dots.

A “Military Invasion” (*Continues*)

The research: **Artillery Fungus (*Sphaerobulus stellatus*)**

Homeowners are occasionally puzzled by the appearance of small black spots spattered on cars, the leaves of ornamental plants, siding, downspouts, soffits and windows of their homes. These spots are often mistakenly identified as tar, scale insects, or insect excrement. The dark spots are 1-2mm in diameter and slightly raised to globular. The outer coating of the spot is actually brown and darkens with age. When scraped open, the center is off-white, finely granular, and gummy.

The black spots are masses of mature spores expelled from fruiting bodies of the fungus. This fungus is a relative of the bird’s nest fungus and is commonly called artillery fungus by mycologists. The spherical fruiting body is approximately 2mm in diameter and produces spores internally. When mature, the fruiting body splits open forming a cup-like structure. The round mass of spores, known as the glebal mass, is about 1mm in diameter and rests in liquid at the bottom of the cup.

About 5 hours after opening the glebal mass is catapulted into the air. This discharge mechanism is estimated to generate 1/10,000hp and can throw the mass up to 6 meters (18 ft). Upon contact, the sticky coating adheres to any surface it touches. The fruiting body is strongly phototropic and the glebal mass is generally shot towards the strongest source of light. Outside, this will be the sun or highly reflective surfaces such as glass or light colored walls. Some homeowners have even noted lighter colored cars having a higher number of the dark spots when parked next to a dark colored car.

The fungus grows on dung and well-rotted wood such as the wood chips used as foundation bed mulches. It prefers open areas with little shade and sufficient moisture. With sufficient light, the optimum temperature range for the production of fruiting bodies is 50 - 70 °F. Since fruiting bodies are not produced above 78 °F the problem tends to be limited to spring and fall.

Fungicides have not been evaluated for control of this fungus. Yearly additions of fresh wood chips may lessen the problem if all the old mulch is completely covered. Scraping glebal masses from windows and walls may possibly re-infest beds since the spores contained in the glebal mass have been reported to be viable for up to 11 years.

(Modified from an article written by Ann Hazelrigg, Plant Diagnostic Clinic Coordinator, Plant and Soil Science Department, University of Vermont)

The following week I had my Hort Helpline day to work and submitted this to Brian Hudelson, our Plant Disease Diagnostician, who confirmed the diagnosis and the lack of control methods (other than removing all mulch).

What remains a mystery to me, is that there is no mulch in 'striking' distance of our boathouse; our garage roof peak is over 20 ft high; many neighbors were also hit, having no or only stone mulch around their houses, and several boats, docked more than 20 ft from land were also covered in the spots.

Fungus growing in mulch:



Fungus on siding:



Part two of the Paulson Road invasion has to do with Caddis Flies.

About the same time, many property owners in our area were also inundated with tan flying insects, somewhat moth-like.

I took two samples and sent photos off to our Insect Diagnostician, PJ Liesch. I was concerned that they could be Sod Webworms. PJ confirmed that they were Caddis Flies, typical habitation being a lake or bodies of water.

From the University of Minnesota Extension:

Size: 1/16 - 1 1/2 inch long (most are between 1/4 - 1 inch long)

Description: Moth-like with wings folded tent-like over the body. Antennae are thin and as long as or longer than the body. Usually drab colored, especially brown or gray.

Where/When: Found near lakes, streams, and wetlands. Attracted to light and can be found around buildings.

Significance: Does not harm people or property.



Again, no control method, except to turn off any outdoor lights, to reduce the attraction. The adults don't live very long, a month or so. One good thing is that they require fresh water, and will not reproduce in polluted waters, which means our Winnebago Pool Lakes System must be in good condition.

No Bare Soil

By Lawanda Jungwirth

Over the 18 years I've been writing this column, I've mentioned the benefits of using mulch in the garden many times. In case you missed it, here it is once more, plus a few new and even more important reasons to keep soil covered.

Mulch is a layer of material spread on the surface of the soil to retain moisture, retard weed growth, prevent soil temperature fluctuations and thwart disease organisms in the soil from splashing up onto plants. Organic mulches such as leaves, pine needles, wood chips, straw and shredded newspaper slowly decompose and improve soil structure and fertility.

Even better than the mulches listed above is a living mulch, preferably one that you've intentionally planted, but even, I hate to say it, weeds. Depending on the size of your garden and your personal definition of what constitutes a beautiful landscape, a living mulch may or may not be practical. But that's a topic for another time.

Here are some things to ponder. Our soils have lost 50-80% of their carbon content since the mid-1800s. Soils that have more carbon are better able to retain water, thus reducing erosion and keeping nutrients in the soil and out of waterways like the Fox River and Lake Winnebago. A recent local news story announced that the bay of Green Bay has a growing dead zone, an area with virtually no oxygen or aquatic life, due to run-off of nutrients from soils.

Regardless of what you believe about climate change, it is a fact that over time, more carbon dioxide has gone into the atmosphere because carbon has oxidized from bare soil than from the burning of fossil fuels. Hydrologist [Michal Kravcik](#) says that "the drying out of landscapes has a much more serious impact on climate change than the increase of CO₂ in the atmosphere." Even a few inches of bare soil between plants allows carbon and water vapor to escape.

Just since the 1970s, the nutritional content of our food has declined more than 50% because it is grown in soil that has been depleted of the minerals it needs to produce healthy crops.

Tilling the soil exposes even more of its surface area to the atmosphere. Tilling provides air to soil microbes that become metabolically supercharged and then release a flood of nutrients for fast crop growth. That may sound great, but those revved-up microbes quickly burn up all the soil's nutrients and then die, actually depleting the soil's fertility. So it is a waste of time and nutrients to till in fall when nothing will be planted in the soil for six months or more, and also in spring before planting when there are no plants immediately needing that extra fertility. In addition, bare, newly tilled soil is susceptible to hard spring or autumn rains that pound on the soil and either compact it or wash it away.

The solution to all the bad news above is to prevent soil from losing carbon, nutrients and moisture by simply keeping it covered!

Buttonbush is an Eye Catcher

By Lawanda Jungwirth

A few weeks ago my husband and I were taking our usual morning walk alongside Lake Butte des Morts. While his gaze turns upward toward waterfowl and songbirds, my eyes are drawn to the sides of the trail and the plants that grow there. This particular morning I was stopped in my tracks by the most unusual shrub I have ever seen.

It was a couple feet tall and featured perfectly round, fragrant, ping pong ball-sized flowers with what looked like pins sticking out of them. My thoughts tumbled quickly. “Wow! What the heck is that?” “How have I not seen this before?” “I sure hope this isn’t a new invasive plant!”

The eye-catcher turned out to be a native perennial shrub called [buttonbush](#), Latin name *Cephalanthus occidentalis*. Other names are button ball, honey-bells, button willow and riverbush.

Buttonbush thrives in moist, neutral or slightly acidic soils and is a perfect addition to a rain garden, pond or stream edge, bog or marshy area. They prefer part shade to full sun. New stems are reddish while older ones have smooth, gray-green bark. Older stems may be twisted, crooked, or leaning, and the crown is irregularly shaped, so if you are looking for a perfectly symmetrical ornamental shrub, this one isn’t for you. It isn’t messy or sloppy in appearance, just casually asymmetrical. Light pruning can be done in spring if a branch or two is bothersome.

Leaves are a glossy, dark green similar to dogwood leaves, and the unusual button flowers appear late July to early August. Buttonbushes can grow 6-12 feet tall and spread 4-8 feet wide. After flowering, the “pins” which are actually the flower pistils, fall off, leaving green balls the size of gumballs. These later turn red and then into brown nutlets that persist through winter.

To keep buttonbush smaller, it can be cut back to six inches in winter or early spring. The next summer it will grow to three feet or so. Even uncut, it may die back to the ground in winter but will re-grow again the next year.

Buttonbush flowers provide nectar for at least thirteen species of butterflies, as well as moths, hummingbirds, bees and other insects. Twenty-four species of birds, including ducks, other shorebirds and water birds eat the seeds and three species of mammals eat the twigs. Wood ducks like to use the plant for protection of brooding nests. Leaves host the larvae of several butterflies. It is a good plant for erosion control along shorelines. It can form dense stands and the plants have a swollen base that stabilizes the bank.

Buttonbush is commercially available, but can easily be grown by sowing fresh seed gathered in late summer or early fall after the seeds have turned brown. Unrooted cuttings can be pushed into moist soil where they will establish on their own.

One caution: Buttonbush foliage is poisonous to humans and other mammals, causing vomiting, convulsions and paralysis if ingested.

Member Meeting Minutes - No August Meeting

Upcoming Events - See Calendar for September Events

Oct. 2/9/16/23/30: Butterfly Garden, 9 AM

Oct. 2/9/16/23/30: Park View Cutting/Veg. Gardens, 12:30 PM

Oct. 16: Education Committee, Benvenuto's, 5:30 PM

Nov. 12: 1:30 Flower Arranging - Park View

Nov. 20: Education Committee, Benvenuto's, 5:30 PM

Answer to What am I?

By Jane Kuhn

I am prairie dropseed. Order: Cyperales. Family: Poaceae / Gramineae – Grass family. Genus: Sporobolus R. Br. – dropseed. Species: sporobolus heterolepis (A. Gray) A. Gray – prairie dropseed. Common names: northern dropseed, prairie dropseed. Tiny, rounded mature seeds drop to the ground from their hulls in fall giving rise to the descriptive common name. Native Americans ground the seeds of this grass to make a tasty flour. Prairie dropseed can add winter interest to the garden. You can find this plant in the rain garden at the Coughlin Center.

References: USDA Plants Database and associated links.



Answer to Ask a Plant Health Advisor:



“Likely fertility issue. I’d be sure to check the soil pH. The dolomite may have caused really high pH, leading to inhibited nutrient uptake. Lime reactions are relatively slow. So unless very large quantities were used relative to the amount of potting mix, the soil pH may not be too high. A soil test would be usferteful, as well as more observations about where on the plant the symptoms are occurring — old vs new leaves; fruit misshapen; spots on fruit; etc. Did the potting mix contain fertilizer (like a Miracle Grow mix)? The cucumber looks like it may have potassium deficiency (yellow at leaf margin, progressing to necrosis); perhaps the tomato as well. Potassium deficiency is exacerbated by dry soil. So it’s possible to have a soil with an “optimum” soil test K level, but still have K deficiency if it has been dry. The bean does not appear to have potassium deficiency and it’s not exhibiting any “classic” micronutrient deficiency symptoms.”

Brian Hudelson, Director of Diagnostic Services & Dr. Carrie Laboski, UW Madison

Shattuck Park Project

pictures by Kim Willman and Julie Gutsmedl





WCMGA Projects

Check your Member Guide for contact information.

Project	Project Lead(s)
Butterfly Garden Miravida Living Oshkosh	Jane Kuhn
Carter Memorial Library, Omro	Pat Behm/Linda Petek
Octagon House, Neenah	Jerry Robak
Invasive Species	Sue Egner/Valerie Stabenow
Morgan House	Kathy Schultz
Neenah Public Library	Tamara Erickson
Oshkosh Area Humane Society	Julie Miller/Matt Miller
Paine Gardens & Arboretum	Virginia Slattery
Park View Cutting Garden	Bill Weber
Park View Prairie Garden	Sally Lindo
Park View Flower Arranging	Lil Hansche
Park View Vegetable Garden	Tom Weber
Farmer's Market	Dorothy Gayhart-Kunz/Janet Priebe/ Synda Jones/Patty Schmitz
Plant Health Advisors	Patty Schmitz/Mary Shepard
Shattuck Park, Neenah	Julie Gutsmedl
Sullivan's Woods	Linda Loker

Project Leads: If you'd like your meetings listed on the calendar, please email information to Anne Murphy.

September 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 Pay your Dues!
2	3	4 Butterfly Garden 9 AM Park View Gardens 12:30 Board Meeting 6:00	5	6	7	8
9	10 Flower Arranging Park View 1:30	11 Volunteer Hours Due Butterfly Garden 9 AM Park View Gardens 12:30 Business Meeting 6:00	12	13	14	15
16	17	18 Butterfly Garden 9 AM Park View Gardens 12:30 Education Comm. Benvenuto's 5:30	19	20	21	22
23	24	25 Butterfly Garden 9 AM Park View Gardens 12:30	26	27	28	29
30						

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