

# North Country Gardeners

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## Greetings

Our 2018 season begins with the All American Selection Design theme of "Get Social in the Garden." Our efforts to design and grow a beautiful teaching and display garden at the Spooner Agriculture Station will continue to be a focus of our volunteer activities. Our 2017 efforts were rewarded by winning the AAS competition with a first place in our division.

This year we are encouraged to expand our outreach to garden fans and visitors through more social media opportunities. In addition to continued expansion of our website, we will explore new ways of reaching out to the community with new ways of sharing our expertise and support with people interested in gardening using other forms of social media.

Our Monarch Way Station perennial garden will continue to inform visitors on how to use native pollinator-friendly plantings, and we will add pollinator-friendly plants for sale at our annual plant sale May 19.

Our Meet Me in the Garden events will be on July 17 and September 8. The annual Twilight Garden Tour will be on August 14, and we hope to add more opportunities for socialization at these events. Plans for adding children's activities in our programming are underway.

We are in the midst of teaching the Level 1 Master Gardener training, which is April 3 to June 19. We have 12 new trainees in our master gardener volunteer training this spring. We hope they will become enthusiastic volunteers in our future community projects.

MGVs are participating in teaching and facilitating the session as we did in 2017. Our 2017 trainees have been enthusiastic participants in the leadership and volunteer activities of our NCMGV association this past year. Bringing in new trainees and other MGVs wanting to transfer to our group is vital in continuing our volunteer role in the community.

Check out our website, [northcountrymgv.org](http://northcountrymgv.org), for information on our activities, events, meeting minutes, continuing education, and volunteer opportunities. Plan to attend our monthly meetings on the fourth Thursday of each month. We love to see as many MGVs there as possible. We have a great group of MGVs who can bring their many talents and skills to our program. Let's have a terrific 2018 gardening season!

We hope to see you at the Spooner Ag Station display garden this summer.

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## Visit us on the Web!

This newsletter and other useful information are online at:

[spooner.ars.wisc.edu](http://spooner.ars.wisc.edu)  
[northcountrymgv.org](http://northcountrymgv.org)  
[facebook.com/spoonerag](https://facebook.com/spoonerag)

## Meet Me in the Garden: Tips, tricks, myths, harvest, seeds, what was learned

By Sue Reinardy

The Teaching and Display Garden will again host visitors for a relaxing program in the garden on July 17 starting at 6 pm. This year's theme is "Get Social in the Garden."

Our garden series will focus on sharing tips, tricks, myths, and truths. Visitors can come with their own tips to share, and University of Wisconsin-Extension Master Gardener Volunteers will be on hand to

share theirs. There will be interactive contests to test everyone's knowledge and how to tell whether what we learned from Grandma and Grandpa holds up with the latest research.

Save the date for the other Meet Me in the Garden program on September 8 at 10 a.m. This late-season program will focus on harvest, seed saving, and what was learned during this garden season.

The Twilight Garden Tour will be on August 24 at 4 p.m.

The Display and Teaching Garden can be found at N5264 Orchard Lane, located 1 1/2 miles east of Spooner on Hwy. 70 or a half-mile west of Hwy 70/53 interchange.

Bring your own chair for the Meet Me in the Garden Series. In the case of inclement weather, programs will be held at the Station Building at W6646 Hwy. 70, Spooner.

## New on the web: northcountrymgv.org

By Sue Reinardy

Over 150 visitors every week visit North Country Master Gardener Volunteer's website, [northcountrymgv.org](http://northcountrymgv.org). Many are finding the materials from this and previous years useful.

Two new features this year are the Calendar and Blog. You can find both by clicking on the orange buttons on the home page or under the far-right tab labeled "MORE".

The calendar is interactive by clicking through the days. You can find more detail, location, and add it to your own Google Calendar.



The blog is intended to provide an easy place to find announcements, information on the latest programs, details on plants growing in the research garden, and links to other

blogs that our members might find useful. We invite you to check it out, make comments, and add to the conversation.

## Transferring MGVs bring their talents to local area

By Donna Amidon

The North Country Master Gardeners give a warm welcome to these transferring MGVs.

- Linda Anderson from Anoka County, Minnesota, resides in Shell Lake, and her volunteer activities include horticultural presentations, staffing diagnostic clinic, and "Ask a Master Gardener" opportunities.

- Dorothee Hembrook, re-engaging from Rusk County, lives in Weyerhaeuser. Her volunteer activities include mini-masters youth gardening and being a Twilight Garden Tour

greeter.

- Barbara Johnson from St. Croix County lives and works in Spooner. She volunteers with community gardens and Garden U, does word processing, designed a booklet for a landscaping seminar, worked the MG booth at fairs, and has been an asset volunteer coordinator.

- Janet Quaderer from Douglas County lives and works in Hayward/LCO, and her volunteer activities include working on the Broadway Garden beds and doing a presentation on an accessible garden bed.

- Paul Thompson from Dakota County, Minnesota, works throughout the country and spends weekends in Webster. His volunteer activities include working in a children's garden, buckthorn expert, and working with the county fair and garden.

- Jessie Crane from Olmsted County, Minnesota, anticipates transferring in 2019, while for now she spends summer weekends on Long Lake. She volunteers as president of their MGV association, is a mentor coordinator, and is on the education committee.

# Bellflowers: Volunteer or invader?

By Sue Reinardy

I notice these flowers. They are volunteers; but are they invasive? In gardener lingo volunteer plants are ones that show up on their own from seeds deposited by birds or the wind. These bell shaped blue lavender flowers perch on a single stem that swings in the breeze. They are state-ly standing above the natural vegetation along our wooded drive, about three feet tall. They look like they belong there. I'm always impressed when something shows up without any assistance from me. I did not need to purchase, plant, or care for these flowers. Yet they give me pleasure every time I walk to the mailbox.

So I'm happy enjoying these volunteers but then get curious. The shape of the flower suggests some sort of bell flower. I go to my wildflower field guide to confirm my thinking. Yes, the family name is Campanulaceae and there are five species listed. One is marked with a red stop sign icon with "Stop It" written in white. This one is considered invasive by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Wisconsin State Herbarium; it is the Creeping Bellflower (*Campanula rapunculoides*). The field guide also indicates that the native bell flower has been confirmed in all Wisconsin counties except seven including my own, Sawyer County. Now I'm worried.

I don't need another invasive plant that needs a lengthy and labor intensive removal process. Our lake association has been trying to eradicate purple loosestrife from our lake for over a decade. There is invasive honeysuckle and buckthorn in the nearby woods. In my own garden there is moneywort and bishop's weed planted by a previous owner that refuses to be terminated. There is no avoiding thistle, knapweed and wild parsnip. The Wisconsin DNR lists on their website 64 regulated invasive plants. We are in a battle



**Bellflowers.** Photos by Sue Reinardy



against these invaders to protect our native species.

I go back out on the driveway and take pictures; notice exactly the type of leaf, stem, and flower parts. They stand with linear elongated leaves that alternate along a single straight stem. On top is a cluster of flowers with five petal lobes and white stamens in the center. I go back to my field guide, go online and compare pictures. I find an article on the Wisconsin Master Gardener website specifically on Creeping Bellflowers. My

plants don't exactly match the description. Mine have alternating, smooth linear leaves not the creeping bellflower's hairy heart-shaped, irregularly toothed leaves. My plant's flowers are on top not like the creeping one's flowers all along the stem. Am I in the clear? Have I avoided having an invasive plant?

I check the Wisconsin DNR invasive species website. The Creeping Bellflower is listed as a restricted species. Wisconsin DNR defines this as: "invasive species that are already established in the state and cause or have the potential to cause significant environmental or economic harm or harm to human health."

I want to be responsible for educating myself and also practicing good environmental stewardship. So I check a few more resource books on native and invasive plants. These sources are confirming my initial evaluation: no, this is not the Creeping Bellflower. Have I checked enough to be certain? What else can I do?

I notice in my field guide references to the Wisconsin State Herbarium. I am not familiar with the resource. No need for my paper field guide, it is all there online with a searchable database. The data base includes updated information and now my county is colored green indicating a documented occurrence of the plant. I check all the different possibilities and am convinced that my conclusion is accurate.

I have a native *Campanula rotundifolia*, common names of either Harebell or Bellflower. On my way to making this determination I have also discovered the Wisconsin State Herbarium and made good use of the resource books in my library. This brings contentment for this gardener, a new plant for my enjoyment that is maintenance free, and the relief it is a native volunteer not invasive.

# What to do with eastern tent caterpillar

By Susan Mahr

University of Wisconsin – Madison

The eastern tent caterpillar, *Malacosoma americanum*, is a conspicuous sight in early spring in Wisconsin. Those white masses in the forks of tree limbs are created by colonies of caterpillars. The tent protects them from predators, such as birds, and from temperature extremes.

They come out of their silken webs to feed in early morning, evening, or at night when it is not too cold. They return to the nest during the heat of the day and remain in the tent during rainy or cold weather.

The nest enlarges in size as the caterpillars grow.

Eastern tent caterpillar is frequently confused with [fall webworm](#), both of which create silken nests. Fall webworm generally occurs later in the season; it feeds on almost all shade, fruit, and ornamental trees except conifers; its nests are located at the ends of the branches, not in branch crotches; and their loosely woven webs enclose foliage while the tents of the eastern tent caterpillar do not.

The eastern tent caterpillar is also often mistaken for the gypsy moth, but that pest doesn't make a tent, attacks many other types of trees, and caterpillars have distinctive pairs of red and blue dots down its back.

The eastern tent caterpillar overwinters as an egg. Masses of 150 to 400 eggs encircle small branches (about 1/4 inch or smaller in diameter) and are covered with a shiny, black varnish-like material. The larvae – caterpillars – hatch about the time of bud break. They leave the tent to forage on newly emerging foliage, but return to the tent when not feeding. Caterpillars from one egg mass stay together to form a colony; caterpillars from two or more egg masses may unite to form one large colony.

The hairy caterpillars are black with a white stripe down the back,



**Eastern tent caterpillar.** Photo by J.R. Carmichael

brown and yellow lines along the sides, and a row of oval blue spots on the sides. Once they finish feeding, they wander away from the nest and spin a white or yellowish silk cocoon in protected places on tree trunks, fences, or buildings. The reddish-brown adult moths emerge about three weeks later.

After mating, the females lay eggs on small branches that remain until the next spring.

Populations of this native North American pest fluctuate from year to year, with outbreaks occurring every several years. Natural enemies, especially various parasitic wasps, some predators, and a few diseases reduce numbers in most years, which partly accounts for the variation in population levels from year to year.

Trees most commonly affected are fruit trees, such as apple, cherry, flowering crabapple, plum, and chokecherry. They may also defoliate other hardwood trees, including ash, birch, hawthorn, maple, oak, poplar, and willow.

While heavy infestations can cause serious defoliation, eastern tent caterpillars rarely kill trees except those already weakened by disease or climate and environmental stresses.

Eastern tent caterpillar is more of a nuisance than detrimental to tree vigor. Feeding does not seriously damage healthy, mature trees – the damage is primarily cosmetic, with trees appearing ragged or unsightly. Even if completely defoliated, most trees will leaf out again within two or three weeks, since caterpillar feeding

generally ends during vigorous leafing activity.

Small trees cannot tolerate as much defoliation without health consequences, and yield on fruit trees will be reduced and trees already weakened by disease or environmental stresses may be killed. And the nests can be an eyesore in the landscape, particularly when exposed by excessive defoliation.

In addition to their feeding damage and unsightly silken nests, this insect can be a nuisance when caterpillars wander about looking for places to pupate. The hairy caterpillars are about 2 inches long when fully grown, with a conspicuous white line running along the back. They create quite a mess when they are accidentally squashed on roads, driveways, sidewalks, and patios.

This insect pest is easiest to control early in the season.

Remove and destroy egg masses during the winter. They can be pruned out or crushed off the branch. On larger trees with many egg masses, dormant oil sprays work very well to suffocate the eggs and prevent them from hatching.

In early spring, remove small tents by hand (wearing gloves).

Remove larger webs with a broom or stick and dispose of the webs along with the caterpillars (crush, burn, or bury them). Wait until the caterpillars are inside the nest, or they may re-establish. Do not attempt to burn tents, as this can cause more damage to the tree than the caterpillars would.

Use a registered insecticide only if the caterpillars are less than one inch in length. Insecticides are not very effective against larger caterpillars, which have done most of their feeding anyway. If the tree is flowering, do not use any products which can kill pollinating bees – use [Bacillus thuringiensis \(BT\)](#) which only affects caterpillars.

# Pollinator garden

By Shelia Squires

## Year One

You will choose a location, purchase your plants and plant your flowers as soon as the weather allows. It is important that the root system is well established before winter sets in. Water and weed around your plants.

## Year Two

Your plants will continue to grow in size and spread as you enjoy the new blooms. Continue to water, fertilize and weed.

## Year Three

Your patience and care will be rewarded. Your plants will continue to grow in size and spread. More and more pollinators will be visiting the banquet table you planted.



Pollinator garden. Photo by Donna Amidon

## Tomatoes, peppers, pollinators will be at spring sale

The UW-Extension North County Master Gardener Volunteers Association (NCMGVA) will hold its 17<sup>th</sup> annual plant sale on Saturday, May 19, at the Spooner Agriculture Research Station and will again feature its specially chosen heirloom tomatoes and a variety of peppers.

New this year will be Pollinator 6 Pack with Wild Lupine, Swamp

Milkweed, Blazing Star Liatris, Butterfly Weed, Black-eyed Susan, and New England Aster.

Heirloom tomatoes were the cornerstone of the group's very first plant sale. Since then, NCMGVA has increased the number of heirloom choices and added a few of their favorite hybrid varieties. New this year is the Geranium Kiss, a stocky dwarf

plant that produces loads of golf ball sized bright red fruit. The tomato and pepper plants are started from seed and grown by volunteers specifically for the sale.

The sale begins at 8 a.m. at the Spooner Ag Research Station on Hwy 70 east of Spooner and runs until the plants are sold out. Gardeners should arrive early for the best selection.

## 'Get social' in award-winning teaching, display garden

By Sue Reinardy

There is excitement again for the new season at the award-winning Spooner Agriculture Research Station Teaching and Display Garden. This year's theme is "Get Social in the Garden." It is borrowed from the All American Selections (AAS) Landscape Design Contest.

The gardens will highlight national AAS ornamental and vegetable winners that are recognized for significant breeding achievements and proven to demonstrate superior garden performance as compared to other like varieties in the market. Our volunteers will add a twist that should delight visitors and encourage

social activities in the garden.

The Teaching and Display Garden is designed and maintained with the help of volunteers. During the growing season the garden hosts many training events and has visitors from schools, garden clubs, and residents of the area. The garden has won national awards for the past five years from the AAS Landscape Design Contest. In 2017 the garden won first place with the theme of "Ornamental Edibles." The judges were impressed with the overall designs in the gardens and also how garden staff and volunteers promoted the contest with newsletters, workshops, events and multi-media outreach.

The garden was established in 1988 as a small test plot for winter hardy plants. This flourishing garden now includes nearly one acre of landscaped, themed ornamental gardens, vegetable plots, displays of small fruits, grapes and fruit trees, and a newly renovated Monarch and Pollinator Sanctuary featuring native perennial plants.

The garden is open to the public for self-guided tours during daylight hours seven days a week mid-May through mid-September. If your group would like to visit or get involved with the garden, please contact the Spooner Agricultural Station at 715-635-3735.

# Six lessons learned from 2017 growing season

By Sue Reinardy

It seems each year there are lessons that nature provides if I'm paying attention and 2017 was no different. I gained new knowledge in five areas.

## Aphids do have an effect on plants

The past few years I have used insecticidal soap to treat aphids who seem to like my *Heliopsis* (False Sunflower). Last year I was delayed in getting to this task, and the aphids magically disappeared.

Last year I thought I would let nature take its course and not use the soap. Well, the aphids did not disappear and remained on the plants almost the entire growing season. While the plants survived, the insects took their toll by aborting the flowering and reducing vegetation.

I cleaned up all the *Heliopsis* down to the ground. This year I'll get the insecticidal soap out at the first sign of aphids and welcome back the blooms on this plant.

## Using Milorganite as a deer repellent

I've heard from friends and fellow gardeners that Milorganite works as a deer repellent. I gave it a try by applying it to all my perennial and shrub beds in early spring using my broadcast fertilizer spreader. With just one application, I noticed a lack of deer damage.

Now my unscientific sample may not convince you to do the same, but I have found other research as reported by the "Milwaukee Journal Sentinel": *The Web site of the Cornell Waste Management Institute at Cornell University reviews research using the fertilizer as a deer repellent. Spreading Milorganite on the ground twice a month in the growing season reduced deer damage to plants in a New York study, the institute said. The fertilizer also reduced deer damage to summer flowers in research done at Berry College in Georgia.*

Milorganite is a low-nitrogen fertilizer created from Milwaukee sewage sludge. It has been found to be safe



**Aphids.** Photo by Sue Reinardy

for use on ornamental plants. I plan on using this in future years because it is so much easier than applying a liquid repellent.

## Be careful about bellflowers

I noticed an expanding patch of bellflowers along the drive and thought I should check to make sure this volunteer plant wouldn't be a thug. After checking my wildflower book, I discovered that there is a native (*Campanula rotundifolia*) and an invasive (*Campanula rapunculoides*).

After more research I was happy to find that I had the native and can enjoy this plant in future years. I love volunteer native plants that I do not have to plant, fertilize, or take care of in any way.

See my article on bellflowers in this newsletter.

## Creeping Jenny is invasive

I didn't realize that I have two cultivars of creeping jenny – the nice golden ornamental 'Aurea' (also called moneywort) and the invasive green *Lysimachia nummularia*.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has restricted the sale of latter (the cultivar 'Aurea' and yellow and gold leaf forms are exempt). I went about trying to eradicate it from my vegetable garden. It has

made itself at home by sending run-

ners in every direction. After a lot of hard work pulling it out, spraying with Round-Up and covering with a heavy-duty landscape fabric, it is somewhat under control.

I suspect I will be battling this plant for many years. Meanwhile the golden moneywort is behaving nicely and is a welcome ground cover in my ornamental bed.

## Blight and tomatoes

It seems that every few years a blight hits tomatoes, and last year was the year. Almost every gardener I talked with was hit with late blight or spotted leaf virus.

I've been careful to rotate the areas where I plant tomatoes in a five-year cycle and mulch the ground under the plants to avoid soil splashing on the leaves but still failed to foil this disease on my tomatoes. Last fall I did a very thorough job of clean-up and also was extra careful to wash the tomato trellis and towers with a bleach solution. This year I'll put an extra layer of mulch in a brand-new spot and try again.

## Chard and kale

Last year I planted Rainbow Chard and Dinosaur Kale as ornamental edibles. They have held up well in both the garden and in containers. They were still looking beautiful even after a freeze. I learned, however, that my household is not particularly fond of either, so in the future I will only grow them as ornamentals.

Every season brings new knowledge and challenges. We had plenty of rain last year and little extremely hot weather that favored the green beans and cucumbers. We had some wonderful late summer and early fall warmth that favored the zinnias and dahlias for beautiful bouquets. In spite of some troubles, there was much that worked out just fine for this gardener.