May 2022

South Schuylkill Garden Club

Third Tuesday of the Month at 6:30

First United Church of Christ, Schuylkill Haven

www.southschuylkillgardenclub.com

www. facebook.com/soschuylkillgardenclub.com

Cultivating the Community Newsletter

Weather Folklore for May

- Dry May, wet June.
- Cold, wet May,
  Barn full of hay.
- A May flood never did anyone good.
- Cold weather always falls on May 11, 12, and 13
- St. Pancras Day (May 12) never passes without frost
- Clouds moving in opposite directions mean rain in about 12 hours.
- When apple blossoms bloom at night,
  for 15 days no rain in sight.

Bus Trip 2022

The Bus trip has been planned for Thursday **May 5,** 2022 to Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve with a guided tour which lasts 1 -1/2 hours. Theme for tour is "Spring Bloomers." Walking on your own after the guided tour is encouraged. The trails are not handicapped accessible. Plants will also be available for purchase. Second stop will be at Paxson Hill Farm Garden

May Meeting

Our regularly monthly meeting for the month of May is scheduled for May 17. (Yes, that is the same day as the Primary). Our speaker for the evening is Sue Reier. Her program is "Personal and Social Benefits of Nature." Sue will present the many benefits of being outdoors benefit.

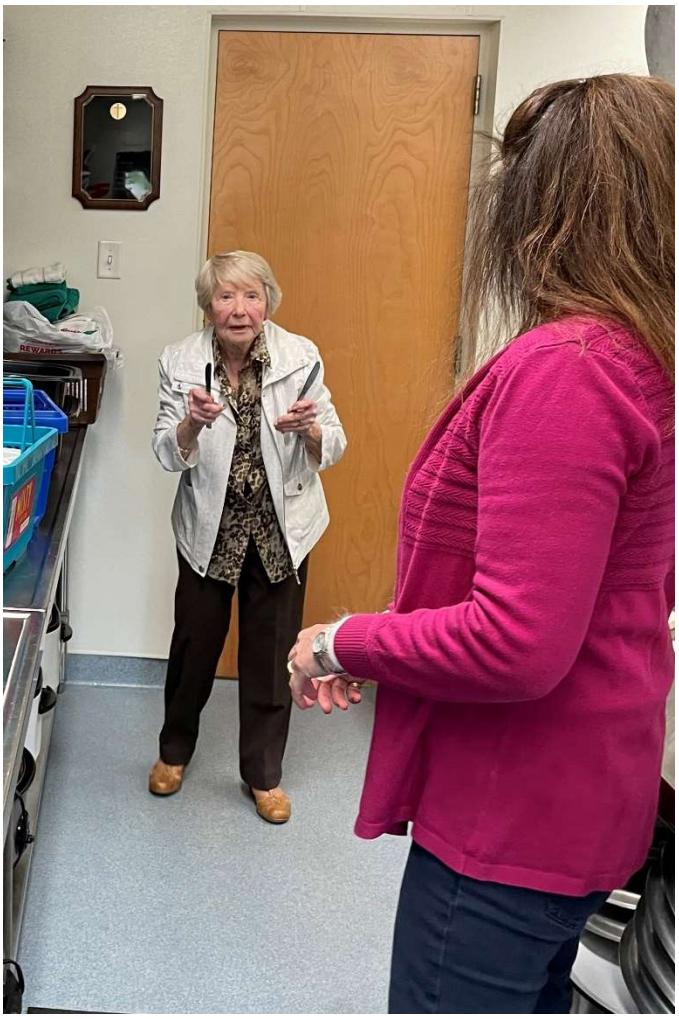
Refreshment committee members are Kathy Townley, Barbara Malewski, Pat Pitkin, Margitta Stevens.

April Tea

Linda Bollinger and her committee of Bonnie Bernat, Kathy Townley, Nancy Russial, Barbara Malewski, Jeanne Zulick, Larry Moyer, Regina Freiler and Helen Moyer are to be commended for a lovely Tea on April 19. Victor Perez, the speaker, explained into detail explaining the cycle of what a gardener would need to do to tend Dahlias. Everyone who attended have a lovely enjoyable evening.

Photos from April Tea

Helen Moyer handy work



Helen and Regina

Jeannie

Carol and Linda

Larry and speaker Victor Perez.

Sorry I don't have more. If anyone has some photo from the TEA and would like to share, please forward them to me.

Plant Sale

Before we know it, we will be out separating and transplanting plants for the annual plant sale. Nancy Russial has agreed to chair this committee. She had a lot of support from Carol, Kaye, and Larry who will play a major role again this year. Members who signed up for the Plant Sale are Linda Bollinger, Kim Morgan, Lillian Patten, MaryAnn Uranium, Bernice Francaviglia, Carol Haldeman, Larry Moyer, Nancy Taylor, Pat Wishousky, Joan Medlinsky, Kaye Moyer, Kathy Townley, Jeanne Zulick, Regina Freiler, Jane Yeasted, and Frank Colosimo.

The plant sale will be held from 8AM to 2PM on **May 21st**. Plants should be dropped off on Friday, **May 20th** from 9AM to 2PM.

The committee is also looking for gently used or refurbished decorative pots as well as lawn and garden ornaments. Also, looking for any items used in gardening. As the sun warms the ground as gardeners, we will be finding ourselves out and about working in our gardens dividing plants. If you are looking to donate those divided plants to the plant sale, please try to get them into pots by May 1st. This gives the transplant time to establish themselves as per recommendation of the Committee. If you are needing help digging out plants that you are interested in transplanting, please reach out to Nancy and a team of club members will be available to help you.

Desk of District II/III Director

570-628-4802 or pachejane@verizon.net

May

Beautification Award

Take a look around your neighborhood and town and observe gardeners who put extra effort in making their yards have 'curb appeal'. Pass along suggestions you have to the "SSGC Helen Moyer Curb Appeal Horticulture Award" members Jane Kruse or Pat McKinney. It will be good to get the award out in the yard early in the blooming year for recognition.

Qualifications is that the property is in Schuylkill County, accessible for public viewing (drive by), and follows good environmental, conservation and water management practices. Forward the address or location description. If the property is not chosen one year, there is always another to be considered.

Let's let people know they are doing a good job throughout this county.

Sweet Peas in the Ground

It is time to get the sweet pea seeds in the ground. It has not been a warm and sunny spring, but the days are longer and the soil temperature is warming. Plant the seeds two inches into the ground, a foot apart, in a sunny location that will have support for the climbing vines. With their growth habit, a rich, neutral pH soil is best.

Once the seedlings are 3 inches tall, the center growing tip can be pinched out just above the first two pairs of leaves to get side growth which has better flowering results. It becomes the choice of the gardener, if you later desire only one stem on the plant or to allow multiple stems to grow. The single stem growth should produce the longest flower stem; multiple stems will have more flower clusters.

Be prepared to tie the stems for support as they start shooting upward. They will bloom when the summer solstice.

June 13 District Meeting

The first District gathering for 2022 will be hosted by South Schuylkill Garden Club on Monday, June 13th starting at 10:00 AM. The location is First United Church of Christ, 110 PA-61, Schuylkill Haven, PA for GPS needs. This is Route 61 north of Route 78 and 22 in Hamburg, turning into University Drive which leads to Penn State Schuylkill and a quick left turn into the parking lot of First UCC.

Hear reports of awards received by District II/III for 2021 events, view the Trash to Treasure displays and 3rd place state winner, and learn all you never thought you would need to know about "iron gall ink". A lunch of salad and quiche will provide opportunity to visit with new gardening friends. Afterward, if you so desire, take a free tour of Yuengling Brewery, step climbing required, or visit the gift shop.

In case you have a friend who would like to take the brewery tour, Schuylkill County is full of morning activities. Take an in ground mining Pioneer Tunnel ride, walk Hawk Mountain or register for a guided bird tour, fish at Sweet Arrow Lake County Park or bring your disc golf equipment, take in a walking tour of downtown Pottsville and eat at the Wheel or Roma Pizza and other possibilities await.

Carol and Linda have graciously agreed to coordinate refreshments. As always, help is needed with this event and if any members are interested in helping, please contact Jane.

Information

Found this tad bit of information in the newspaper. The PSU Master Gardeners of Schuylkill County will host an informational session about seeds and forming a seed library from 1-2 PM on May 14 at the Orwigsburg Area Free Public Library, 216 W. Independence St. Free seeds will be available while supplies last. Future meetings of interested gardeners will be held 1-2 PM the second Saturday in June, July, August, and September at the library.

Mother Day Flower

Many lucky mothers will receive flowers as Mother's Day gifts. Here are a few tips on how to take care of flowers and help them look fresh longer.

When you receive a flower arrangement, there is really nothing you need to do except pay attention to the color of the water.

To prolong the life of your arrangement, make sure to change out the water every couple of days, or when it is discolored. Clean, cold water is best for flowers.

As far as feeding your flowers go, if a food packet comes with it, certainly put the food in the vase.

If you receive a bouquet of flowers or uncut flowers, the first step is to cut a small portion off the bottom of the stem. It is best to cut the stem at a downward angle. The same goes for these flowers as far as changing out the water every few days.

Even though how a person cares for flowers has a big impact on how long they live, some types of flowers just live longer than others in general.

For example, Carnations can last up to two or three weeks if they are properly taken care of. Baby's Breath and Matsumoto Asters are other flowers that live for a relatively long time.

Hydrangeas, though beautiful, are one of the toughest flowers to keep looking fresh.

2022 Master Gardner Plant Sale Directory

Penn State Master Gardeners are busy getting ready for spring plant sales in all parts of Pennsylvania! In addition to old favorites, there are new and exciting plant varieties, many grown by Master Gardeners. Master Gardeners are on hand to help with questions, and some counties offer youth-activities, educational talks and demonstrations, tools, and books for sale. Sales support educational programs and feature plants chosen for local growing conditions.

The link for this directory is listed below alphabetically by county.
https://click.email.extension.psu.edu/?qs=485f4d6d378e969259714c530edb99afdfd1ec095142d992c4735cb5d9095283351b28bb4fcb58c65341225eff6d71131fc86a363d0d0526bed404f2ba97eaa1

Please share photos from your gardens. Email photo to: kamorgan11@gmail.com or text to 570-617-0808

Maryann Uranium shares some photos from her garden:

A Semi-Annual Plant Swap will be held on May 14 at Waterfall Pavilion off Waterfall Road at Sweet Arrow Lake County Park. Check out the county park website for more information.
http://www.sweetarrowlakepark.com/

Practical Tips for Healthy Soil in a Home Garden

Learn what healthy soil is composed of and best practices for providing healthy soil for optimal plant growth.

Updated: February 28, 2022

Photo credit: Glan Carrie on Unsplash

I'm a "soil first" gardener. I believe it is the most critical first step to creating and sustaining a healthy and productive garden. This article explains the basics of soil and offers practical tips for gardeners on ways to build and maintain healthy functioning garden soil.

Soil Basics

Some think of soil as simply the stuff that anchors plants into the ground. In actuality, soil is a lively interaction between structured solids (such as weathered rock minerals and decaying organic matter), living microorganisms and plant roots, as well as water, air, and nutrients.

Solid rock minerals play a large role in how soil functions. Soil is made of approximately 45% weathered mineral particles from the parent rocks of the area. You can discover your county's parent

rock map and much more through a geology website from Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

A most obvious, basic characteristic of soil minerals is texture, which is determined by the size of the three mineral types it can contain. Sand is the largest-sized and coarsest mineral particle (0.05-2.0mm), silt is smaller (0.002-0.05mm), and clay is the smallest (<0.002 mm). Texture is not easily changed, since it is fixed by the locale's parent rocks. Soil texture influences how it functions. Small-sized particles like clay and silt hold water and nutrients and slow the breakdown of organic matter. Larger sand particles drain water quickly and provide better soil aeration. Home garden soils vary in the proportions of the three different textures. For example, loam contains equal parts of sand, silt, and clay, and is considered ideal for plant growth. Silty loam texture is a common Pennsylvania soil, in which silt predominates with sand and clay in lesser amounts. You can find the soil texture profile of your area at the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) online Web Soil Survey (WSS).

Organic matter is largely made of carbon and is vital for healthy soil. Organic matter is mostly decaying dead plant residues and decomposed humus, but also includes living beneficial microorganisms and plant roots. Organic matter holds soil nutrients. As organic matter decays it slowly releases nutrients for use by plants. It also supplies food for living microorganisms in the soil. One of the most important characteristics/functions of organic matter is that it binds with mineral particles to create soil aggregates, called clusters. Open micro- and macro-pore spaces form around the clusters. The pore spaces are critical in that they hold water and transport air and dissolved nutrients through the plant root zone. They also allow space for fine roots.

Plants need nutrients for healthy growth, and they obtain them from the environment, soil minerals and organic matter, and added fertilizer. (Note that addition of fertilizer should always be determined by a soil test.) Organic nutrients include carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen. These three are essential nutrients for plant growth and are found in the environment's air and water. Primary macronutrients obtained by plants from the soil are nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K). Phosphorus and potassium are long-lived in the soil. Nitrogen leeches from the soil easily and often needs to be replenished. Fertilizers will provide the amount of these three nutrients as three numbers, such as 10-10-10 or 20-2-5. Secondary macronutrients found in soil minerals include calcium, magnesium, and sulfur. Additional nutrients required but in small amounts (hence, they are called micronutrients) include iron, boron, zinc, copper, manganese, molybdenum, chlorine, and cobalt. Soil pH is a measure of acidity or alkalinity and affects the availability of nutrients to plants. Plants will show symptoms if there is an overabundance or deficiency in any of the macronutrients or micronutrients in soil or in their ability to absorb them. Conduct a soil test to determine the level of macronutrients in your soil and whether a fertilizer or pH adjustment is needed. Apply fertilizers based on soil test recommendations.

Soil is home to a large and diverse living community of beneficial microorganisms and insects. They contribute to soil health by maintaining a loose, aggregate soil structure, providing decomposing organic matter, recycling nutrients, and biologically suppressing plant pests.

Practical Tips for Healthy Soil

Soil health looks at how well a soil's make-up functions to support the growth and health of plants. These practical tips and gardening practices focus on the main properties of soil - physical, biological, and nutritive - that can be affected and are changeable. Gardeners can work to cultivate healthier soil in their home gardens.

1. Know the Look and Feel of Your Soil

Since 50% of soil is its physical structure, it is time well spent to feel your garden soil with your hands

and to examine it thoughtfully. These field observations can help you determine the soil's texture, structure, and workability.

Feel the soil's texture by rubbing a small amount of soil between your fingers. Sandy soil feels coarse and gritty and falls apart easily when wet. Silt feels floury or silky when dry, yet slick and smooth when wet. Clay feels slick and sticky when moist and dries into hard clods often with cracks in the soil surface.

Dig up a sizable soil clump and examine it. Good soil structure feels crumbly or granular. It will have visible clumps. There may be loose pieces of soil with clinging plant roots and decaying organic matter.

Working your garden soil when it is too wet harms its structure. Take a handful of soil and press it tightly. Workable soil crumbles readily. Soil that is too wet stays as a compact mass, is sticky or muddy. It is not suitable for digging and planting. If the too-wet soil is mostly clay or silt, working it will cause it to crust and harden, further damaging its structure. Do not work soil that is too wet—it causes real damage!

2. Feed Your Soil with Organic Matter

Adequate organic matter is one of the most important indicators of soil health. Amending your soil with organic matter is easily done by just mixing it directly into the garden soil. Add organic matter when you make a new garden bed, expand an established bed and when you place new plantings. Dig-in or rototill 1 to 3 inches of organic matter into the top 6 to 12 inches of your garden bed and even deeper in a landscape bed. Fall is a good time to work in organic matter since it will spend the winter decomposing.

Commonly used organic soil amendments include

- Shredded leaves
- Home composting organic matter (see Home Composting: A Guide for Home Gardeners)
- Compost from spent mushroom substrate (mushroom manure or mushroom soil)
- Peat moss
- Aged/dried animal manures
- Humus

Organic matter characteristics differ. For example, aged composts and dried manures contain intrinsic nutrients, while peat moss does not. Peat moss holds more water than composts but has an acidic pH, however it is not proven that it lowers soil pH. Mushroom manure tends to be alkaline. Wood chips, sawdust and some animal manures may be considered too fresh. Using them as a soil amendment will tie up soil nitrogen as nitrogen is used heavily in the decomposition process. For very coarse tree bark/wood chips and sawdust, it is recommended these be composted one or two years before working into soil. When buying organic matter, always check the actual ingredients to know what is in the bag. If buying compost in bulk, be sure it was made following composting standards that include adequate temperature and time.

Garden soils with adequate organic matter tend to have a good open structure (be granular in appearance) and will be less compacted and more porous for plant roots. Organic matter keeps small particles like clay from forming a solid mass when wet or dry and also helps sandy soils hold nutrients and water. A Penn State soil test can, on request, measure the percentage of organic matter. When the results of the soil test report the relative cation exchange capacity (CEC) of less than 15, amend with at least 1 inch of organic matter.

3. Protect Your Soil with Organic Mulching

- Mulches are applied as a uniform layer over the top of garden soil. When done correctly, mulching is a very beneficial garden practice. Organic mulches protect and improve garden soil through:
- Retaining soil moisture by shading the soil from harsh sun
- Moderating seasonal temperature extremes
- Lessening weed germination and growth

- Decomposing, thereby adding nutrients (organic matter!) and improving structure
- Retaining rainwater and mild runoff

A variety of organic mulch materials exist for the home garden, including shredded bark or hardwood, shredded leaves, ½-inch screened compost, pine needles, pine bark nuggets, coarse wood chips and straw. An adequate and uniform depth of bark/hardwood or screened compost materials performs well. For more information on dyed mulch, see Mulch, A Survey of Available Options .

Mid-spring is a good time to mulch garden beds. Remove weeds and clean-up plant debris (add to your compost pile). Place a 2- to 4-inch uniform layer of organic matter on top of the garden soil. Take into consideration any remaining mulch from last season so as not to lay down too much. When mulching around a shrub or tree, keep all mulch 3 to 5 inches away from the base of its stems or trunk. Mulch touching the stems and trunks of trees and shrubs cause health problems and result in plant decline, or even death.

Synthetic (non-organic) mulches, like decorative stone, gravel, and landscape fabrics, are available. While they are long-lasting, synthetic mulches do not enhance soil quality like organic mulches do. Stones and gravel absorb heat, drying out soil and, thus, may harm beneficial the microorganisms living there. Air-borne weed seeds land between the stones and gravel and weeds sprout. Landscape fabrics serve as a barrier on top of garden soil but are problematic because they can limit activity of water and biological activity in the soil and degrade over time.

4. Avoid Soil Compaction - Tread and Till with Care

Soil compaction occurs with too much foot traffic, use of heavy equipment and other heavy loads, especially when the soil is wet or saturated. So, treat your garden soil carefully - walk on paths, keep garden carts on paths, and do not park or ride heavy vehicles on the lawn. Wait until garden soil is relatively dry in the spring before digging, planting, and stepping on it. Too much mechanical rototilling may also lead to compaction as soil aggregates are adversely affected. Newly rototilled soil may look loose and friable, but if watered and stepped on during planting, the soil may readily compact and become firm. Compaction compresses soil's aggregate structure, reducing pore spacing. This leads to poor water infiltration, runoff, erosion, and ponding in your garden. Compacted soil may not be sufficient for plant roots to be able to grow, find water, air, and nutrients.

5. Be Fertile, Do A Soil Test!

Knowing about a soil's nutrients is to know about its fertility. A balance of available nutrients is essential for optimal plant growth. The only way to know for sure is to conduct a soil fertility test, available through your county Penn State Extension office. The soil test reports levels of the macronutrients phosphorus (P), potassium (K), calcium (Ca) and magnesium (Mg). It also makes a nitrogen (N) recommendation based on the intended crop. Soil pH, which affects the release of nutrients in the soil, and the soil's relative cation exchange capacity (CEC), which gauges soil nutrient holding capacity, are also reported. The percentage of organic matter is provided, on request. For any abnormal finding, a corrective recommendation is also provided. Recommendations typically note the need for lime, magnesium and/or a fertilizer containing nutrients, such as nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P) and potassium (K). Information on interpreting your soil test can be found in the Penn State article Interpreting Your Soil Test Reports .

6. Avoid, or Limit, Pesticide Use

Did you know that a well-tended garden rarely needs pesticides? It is normal to see insects on outdoor garden plants. Most do no or little damage. For most pests, a counterpart beneficial insect is looking to devour it. Healthy soil is normally teeming with a living community of beneficial microorganisms. Monitor your garden. If you see pest problem, take a thoughtful stepwise approach to determine whether a pesticide is necessary. Don't spray at the first sign of damage. Spraying pesticides needlessly can kill beneficial

insects, including pollinators. Systemic pesticides taken up by plant roots and leaves can also hurt beneficial insects and other wildlife. Information on safeguarding habitat and encouraging pollinators can be found in the guidelines for Penn State's Pollinator-Friendly Garden Certification Program.

First, address other possible underlying causes of plant problems by implementing good gardening practices through

- Maintaining healthy soil with compost and mulch
- Selecting healthy (and even disease-resistant) plants and planting them in the right conditions
- Removing diseased, decaying, and dead plants
- Pulling weeds before they spread
- Changing a gardening practice, eliminate overhead watering in favor or watering the soil

Second, if the damage due to an insect, consider non-chemical mechanical controls first. Set a trap, place screening, or hand-pick the pest.

Third, if a pesticide can't be avoided

- Identify the specific insect
- Always first consider options that are less toxic such as insecticidal soap or horticultural oil
- Find a product that is labeled specifically for the pest
- Read the pesticide product label. Use according to label instructions. More is not better.
- Pay attention to and heed the product's environmental and safe use warnings

Thomas Mrazik

Master Gardner

Montgomery County

So, I started this list below and I would love if all of you experienced gardeners would send me your ideas of *"You know you are a Gardner when . . ."* Let us keep the ideas flowing and add to the list. Let us see how many ideas we can come up with. Just email your ideas to me at kamorgan11@gmail.com or text it to me at 5706170808

You know you are a Gardner when:

- Your gardening gloves fall out of the car door
- You have gardening tools in trunk of your car
- You develop community gardens
- Your gardens are themed
- You weed your neighbors' gardens
- You dead head your daughter's flowers
- You empty the dehumidifier and use the water to water your potted plants
- You sprinkle your son's hair from a recent haircut around your plants to keep the deer away
- Pull weeds in public gardens
- Carry a small set of pruners in your back pocket
- You are constantly checking the weather report
- You plant by the phases of the moon
- You cover your fall plants to protect them from the first fall frost
- You count on the first frost being in November
- You cover your plants before the frost hits.
- Clean your gardening equipment before putting away for the season

- You stare looking at seed and plant catalogues for next year
- You know you are a Gardener ... When you go to the store for groceries and come home with some plants that just jumped into your cart. – Pat P.
- You know you are a Gardener ... when you can resist everything but temptation in a Garden Center. There is always room for one more. – Pat P.
- You know you are a Gardener ... when you smile YES when a gardener-friend asks you if you could use a few irises or daylilies that she is separating because they need thinning. – Pat P.
- You know you are a Gardener ... when the Plant catalogs arrive in the middle of winter. – Pat P.
- You know you are a Gardener ... when the plants in your garden have come from other gardening friends. Memories ... I plant my friends. – Pat
- You are out on those warm sunny days looking or the first signs of spring popping up from the soil.
- You are looking for the first robin to land in your yard.
- The March winds blow off your sun hat when you are out in the garden.
- You are anywhere that you see drying seed pods on a plant and you wonder if you can get away with collecting some and where you can try planting them. -Kathy T.
- *You know you are a gardener when your dog digs a hole going after a varmint and then you place a plant in it - Jeanne*
- *You know you are a gardener when _____.*

Weed It and Reap