

SUBURBAN LIFE

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GALE WEISMAN

Spring into garden work

As we are anxiously awaiting our gardening days, we gaze out the window and see the awakening earth.

We are really tempted to walk all around the yard noting everything. But halt! Before all the moisture is out of the soil during spring thaw, walking around causes great soil compaction.

Let's look at our garden as a room that we can section off. We begin our exploration with the floor of our room.

To eliminate compaction, core aeration is often recommended. This will stimulate grass growth. It relieves compaction of clay soils and stimulates grass root growth. Coring may be done in spring or fall.

To break up clay particles in the soil, we generally use Canadian sphagnum peat moss, which is mixed into the topsoil of your garden. I also recommend using sharp sand, often referred to as a builder's sand, to improve drainage and assist in your soil's texture.

When the soil is soft, it is easy to pull the perennial weeds that have begun to sprout. The best and easiest job that you have to do at this time is weed, weed, weed. Once the soil is clean, tilled, and prettied up by cultivating, you may want to apply a pre-emergent herbicide (like Preen) or a layer of fresh mulching material. Remember not to till the soil again during the season because the herbicide barrier is then broken. If mulch is applied, do not use more than a three inch layer and do not apply right up to the trunk or stem, which may cause plant fungal or bacterial diseases. Sometimes gardeners want to add topsoil, which is not regulated by any standard and is full of weed seeds.

We might also want to have our soil tested for mineral contents, and acidity or alkalinity. The available nutrient status in a garden soil determines what kind and how much fertilizer should be used. A soil test kit is available from Michigan State University extension by calling 810-838-0880 for information. The cost for pick-up is \$7.50 and by mail, the cost is \$8.50. A desirable soil surface in good condition for plant growth contains 60 percent solid material and 60 percent open pore space.

The next space in our room is the walls where we think about annuals, perennials and shrubbery.

Annuals should not be put into our decorative scheme until May 31, which is the last frost date for this area. Remembering when purchasing annuals to pinch back the flowering heads, and side dress with a balanced flower fertilizer.

Perennials need a lot of attention at this time of year. Look at the crown, trimming back dead parts, and division. Care must be taken when you are working with the crown. Trim away all stems and leaves carefully. Remember that many perennials will sprout only after the soil temperature has really warmed. Hostas, chrysanthemums, hibiscus, and rose of Sharon are just a few of the late risers.

Division of our perennials is then our biggest task at this time of year. One of the greatest advantages of perennials is our reward of many new plants from our old ones. A large perennial clump often can be divided into three or more small plants. With a pitchfork or shovel, lift the entire perennial in one clump. Slice the root ball with your shovel or knife into three equal pieces. Discard any sections that appear dead, aged, or diseased. Side dress your new planting with a weak formation until they have adjusted to the move.

Taking care to dig a large root ball, you can move a perennial and often it will not even know it has been moved. Special directions and timing must be taken with irises and peonies.

This is the time of year that we should also be thinking about pruning shrubbery. Generally spring flowering shrubs are pruned after they bloom. Summer or fall flowering shrubs should be pruned in the early spring. Any specialty plant should be looked up and investigated in a good gardening manual.

The last part of our room is the ceiling where we see trees, large shrubs, and most importantly, the sunlight.

Let's focus on our friends the trees. Deciduous trees lose their leaves in the fall and will soon have new leaves emerging in the spring. Pruning is often done in early spring on deciduous trees. Do not prune maples in the spring because of the considerable running of the sap. Fruit trees are generally winter pruned, but new research indicates summer pruning may be beneficial.

Look at your garden as a living room. At times we clean up, redecorate, and even change its function. So too with your garden. Enjoy!

Gale Weisman, a Hill and Dale Garden Club member, is chairman of the Southern Michigan Units of the Herb Society of America. Weisman, a Farmington Hills resident, is an advanced master gardener works at the Garden Hotline, a MSU Extension Service of Oakland County.



SHARON LAMBERT/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Filling empty bowls: Farmington Area Crop Walk volunteers Cheryl Carter, Judy Hauser and Liz Brandon held an informational meeting recently to inform walkers about the route and other details of the event.

Crop Walk

Exercising a need to feed the poor



BY DIANE GALE
STAFF WRITER

Folks from the Farmington area will burn calories Sunday, May 1, to help feed the hungry.

Members of area agencies and churches hope to raise more than \$28,000 during the annual Crop Walk, sponsored by the Church World Services, a relief, development, and self-help agency providing resources for hungry people in more than 70 countries through partner agencies.

Some of the countries that receive resources from the program are: Sudan, Liberia, Jordan, Peru, Thailand, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia.

Twenty-five percent of the money raised locally will go to area organi-

zations like the Salvation Army, Neighborhood House, Baldwin Kitchen of Pontiac and St. Alexander's Food Cupboard.

"You see it going to work," said Cheryl Carter of the Farmington Area Salvation Army and co-chair of the Farmington Area Crop Walk.

"It's hard, especially in the summer," Carter said. "We don't get a lot of food during the summer months and our pantries go bare. This is a tremendous boost for us and all the agencies involved."

This is the ninth annual Farmington Area Crop Walk, and members of more than 20 area churches will traverse the 10-kilometer trot through Farmington and Farmington Hills, according to Judy Hauser, Farmington Area Crop Walk co-chair. Walkers collect

pledges for every kilometer they walk.

It's not too late to participate. Some walkers have been known to join the crowd unannounced the day of the walk, according to Gert Alkama, Farmington Area Crop Walk volunteer.

Registration will be taken starting at 1:30 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church on Grand River in downtown Farmington. Starting time is 2 p.m.

The route meanders by Our Lady of Sorrows on Power Road; to Salem United Church of Christ on Oakland; to Orchard United Methodist Church at Drake and Grand River to St. John Lutheran Church on Gill Road to the finish line at First United Methodist Church. Refreshments will be available along the route.

Walkers can take heart in the fact that people around the world will be taking part in their respective local Crop Walk program. While they may feel they're a part of a global effort, they can also get better acquainted with their own surroundings.

"This is a great way to get to know your neighbor," according to Michael Garr, Crop Walk volunteer for public relations.

"And it's a nice way to bump into people you don't normally see."

Volunteers raised \$30,000 nine years ago at the first Farmington area Crop Walk, and \$28,800 was raised last year. Organizers hope to increase the figure by \$3,000 this year.

Quite a tradition has developed since the birth of the CROP program in 1948 when a group of Midwest farmers decided to send grain to Europe to feed the hungry. They took on the acronym CROP for Christian Rural Overseas Program, according to David Bower, Michigan director of Church World Services/Crop Walk.

"CROP is not an acronym for anything now," he said. "We're focusing on hunger and we're trying to get anyone who will participate."

For more information about the walk, call Hauser at 661-5139, Carter at 477-1153 or Alkama at 349-4008.

Space wiz sets 'out of this world' goals

Maura Duggan has her head in the stars.

"I've always said I wanted to live on Mars or the moon and I'm sure it will be possible one day," said Duggan.

She should know about the possibilities. The 16-year-old junior at Detroit Country Day high school has been to NASA's space camp programs in Florida and Alabama five times. Having completed spacecamp, space academy level one, space academy level two, aviation challenge basic and aviation challenge intermediate, Duggan has conquered every NASA program a young person can.

She knows what it feels like to walk on the moon and fly jets. Both were simulated experiments, but real enough. Duggan said she crashed the jet twelve times before finally mastering the task the last day of the session. Once, Duggan and her team won the best rocket launch sending the vessel the highest and farthest, which was more than 100 feet.

She learned about space, the solar system, space travel and the mechanics of what it takes to get past earth.

"You go there and learn as the astronauts do and learn about their missions," said Duggan



SHARON LAMBERT/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Space camp achiever: Maura Duggan has completed five NASA-sponsored space camps in Florida and Alabama. The teen has mastered the entire space program offered to young civilians.

hopping around her upstairs bedroom. The basketball, soccer and track enthusiast injured her knee on the court.

In spite of the extensive training, becoming an astronaut isn't her first priority. Duggan would rather find a job flying in "the military, definitely," Duggan said. "I always wanted to serve my country and I've always wanted to fly."

Maybe after the military stint, Duggan said, she will consider NASA.

Duggan admires astronaut Sally Ride because of her courage.

"She knew what she wanted and she went right after it," Duggan said.

For the near future, Duggan said she wanted to attend one of the military academies or enroll in a university ROTC program. Her grandfather, William Duggan Sr., was in the Marines.

In a bedroom filled with memorabilia from space camp, including plaques commemorating the completion of NASA programs, the most special keepsake is an American flag used in her grandfather's funeral.

About living on Mars, Duggan said: "I think that's the farthest away from home. I like home, but I'd like to see how far away I can get from it."