

## GARDENING

## GARDENING CALENDAR

Does your garden club have an upcoming event or meeting you want publicized? Send items for consideration in Gardening Calendar to Ken Abramczyk, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150 or e-mail [kabramczyk@oe.homedomain.net](mailto:kabramczyk@oe.homedomain.net). To send a fax, call (734) 591-7279.

## BACK TO SCHOOL

**MORE GARDENING**  
The Michigan School of Gardening, 29429 Six Mile, in Livonia offers a variety of subjects. Register in advance. Classes are limited in size. Weekly classes usually are scheduled for 9:30 a.m., while evening courses begin at 6:30 p.m. Classes listed here will be taught at the Livonia facility. Here is a list of some of the classes, some of which require prerequisite courses or experience: Difficult Sites Part I on wet and dry sites, two Thursdays, starting June 7; Difficult Sites Part II, starting Thursday, June 21. Also, the school plans to host Alan Armitage, internationally acclaimed gardener, author, instructor and professor of horticulture on Friday, June 22 and Saturday, June 23 will appear at garden tours in Beverly Hills and Bloomfield Hills. Armitage will appear at the Michigan State University Management Education Center in Troy on Sunday, June 24. Tickets are \$45 per person, \$55 after May 25. Call (248) 4-GARDEN for a brochure and registration on the Armitage visit.  
For information on spring classes, times and costs or click on [www.michigangardening.com](http://www.michigangardening.com) for class information or for classes at other locations in Detroit, Pontiac and Macomb Township.

## FLOWER SALE

**POTTED PLANTS**  
Approximately 500 potted plants will be available at the Friends of the Wilson Barn annual spring flower sale May 10-13, including lilies, chrysanthemums, tulips, daffodils, azaleas and small orchid corsages. Hours are 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday, May 10; 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Friday, May 11 and Saturday, May 12; and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, May 13, at the Wilson Barn, 29350 West Chicago (at Middlebelt) in Livonia. Anyone who has any questions regarding the sale can call the Barn at (734) 427-4311 and leave a message.

**PLANT SALE**  
Bedding plants and potted plants will be available 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday, May 3, at the Northville Farmers Market in the Northville Downs parking lot at Seven Mile and Sheldon. Arts and crafts and garden art will be available. The sale will be a great opportunity to purchase Mother's Day plants and gifts. The Farmers Market, sponsored by the Northville Chamber of Commerce, is scheduled every Thursday, May through October. Call (248) 349-7640.

**NORTHVILLE**  
The 14th Annual Flower Sale visits downtown Northville, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday, May 25, and 9 a.m.-6 p.m., Saturday, May 26. Among the many spring and summer blossoms for sale are annuals, perennials, shrubs, roses and exotic plants and herbs. For information, call (248) 348-0488.

## CLUBS

**FARMINGTON**  
Charlotte Dasher, a Farmington Garden Club member and landscape school chairman for the Federated Garden Club of Michigan, will present a floral

design program at the Farmington Garden Club meeting noon Monday, May 7 at the Longacre House on the west side of Farmington Road between 10 Mile and 11 Mile roads. Visitors are welcome. Call (248) 478-3017 for information.

**HERBS**  
The evening herb study group at the University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens will car-pool at 11 a.m. Saturday, May 12, to Renaissance Acres in Whitmore Lake. The organic herb farm has been in operation for 20 years. The group will be taken on a tour and allowed to browse for plants. Meet in Room 125 of the Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 N. Dixboro Road. Members and guests are welcome. For information, call (734) 449-2334.

**HOSTS**  
The Metro Detroit Hosts Society has scheduled its annual plant sale 1-4 p.m. Sunday, May 20 at the Birmingham Congregational Church at Cranbrook Road and Woodward. Hosts, companion plants, perennials and rock garden plants will be for sale. Admissions is free.

## WALKS

**LIVONIA**  
The Friends for the Development of Greenmead (Livonia's Historical Village) presents its annual Spring Walk from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, June 23. Seven lovely gardens and yards of homes located in Livonia will be open for viewing. All proceeds benefit the restoration and preservation of Greenmead Historical Village. Tickets are \$9 in advance, \$10 the day of the event and can be purchased from any of the three Livonia libraries, the Civic Center Library Gift Shop, Greenmead and the Department of Community Resources located on the fifth floor of Livonia City Hall. For information, call (734) 466-2540 or (734) 425-4855.

## Learn about slow-release fertilizers

## GARDEN SPOT



MARTY FIGLEY

We hear more and more about slow-release fertilizers, and many people may wonder just what this term means.

Lillian Dean, coordinator of the Southeastern Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority Healthy Lawn and Garden Program, and Greg Patchen, Oakland County Michigan State University Extension horticultural agent, explain it this way:

Nitrogen fertilizers are classified as either quick- or slow-release products. The response from quick-release sources occurs within days after application and is visible through increased growth and greener color. Disadvantages of quick-release nitrogen include its high-burn potential, short residual and increased potential for leaching, volatility and runoff. The nitrogen sources in them also have a relative high-salt index. The flush of growth lasts a relatively short time with the effects of the nitrogen wearing off within four weeks.

In contrast, slow-release sources discharge nitrogen over an extended period of time. The major advantages of these products are low-burn potential, lower risk of nitrogen loss, fewer applications and more uniform growth response. Disadvantages include slow initial plant response and the need to apply the product in granular form.

Fertilizers with 40 to 60 percent slow-release nitrogen are recommended to be labeled as "slow-release." There are several types:

■ Natural organic fertilizers

— nitrogen is released through microbial action (microbes are tiny germs in the soil)

■ Timed-release, coated fertilizers — nitrogen is released as the coating dissolves

■ Fertilizers with significant quantities of water-insoluble nitrogen — nitrogen slowly dissolves in water.

Natural organic materials and some synthetic organic materials depend on microbial decomposition alone. Other synthetic organic materials and coated nitrogen products depend on physical and/or chemical processes in combination with microbial activity.

Natural organic fertilizers are derived from manure or by-products of plant and animal processing industries. Organic fertilizers require a greater volume of materials because of their low nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus (N-P-K) content but they contribute organic matter that supports healthy biological activity in the soil system. All organic fertilizers are slow-release.

## Suggestions

The question: Is fertilizer a source of lake, river and groundwater pollution?

After much research, "The answer 'it depends' is all that can be said," Dean said.

"When used at recommended rates under managed conditions at test plots, there is no evidence that nitrogen fertilizers contribute to water quality problems," she said.

"However, field studies completed in the last several years have documented lawn fertilizer as a source of nutrient in storm water runoff. Nitrogen and phosphorus, especially, can affect lakes and streams by stimulating excess algae which depletes

oxygen from the water, thus a degradation of the aquatic habitat for small invertebrate animals and fish."

The Healthy Lawn Program, sponsored by SOCRRA, recommends the following:

1. Cut the grass high, leaving 3 inches on the blade after cutting, if possible.

2. Water the lawn frequently but lightly — enough so water reaches the roots but without over-watering.

3. Use slow-release fertilizer in accordance with the results of a soil test. Two to four annual applications are recommended by MSU Extension personnel.

4. Avoid weed-and-feed. Dig weeds by hand, and/or spot treat problem areas. Practice integrated pest management and search for the least toxic approach.

By following these suggestions, the lawn will be healthy and thick and naturally resistant to disease damage.

Roots will also help hold soil in place, reducing soil erosion into storm sewers, lakes and streams.

## Good garden tips

■ A seedling is ready for planting when its root base is as wide as the plant is high. If the plant's height is greater than the width of the root base, increase its planting depth.

■ Want to grow elephant garlic? Plant separated cloves base down 2 inches deep as soon as the soil is warm. Fertilize two or three times during the growing season. It needs full sun and lots of water to develop the cloves.

Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone. Her fax number is (248) 644-1314.

## Matthaei hosts plant sale this weekend

Matthaei Botanical Gardens will host its 21st annual spring plant sale and marketplace Friday-Sunday, May 4-6, at 1800 N. Dixboro in Ann Arbor. The sale is one of the largest of its kind in Michigan and will offer a huge array of plants,

including more than 1,200 varieties, and unusual wares for the garden enthusiast. The event will begin with a presale for MGB members only 8-7 p.m. Friday. Hours for the general public are 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Saturday-Sunday.

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