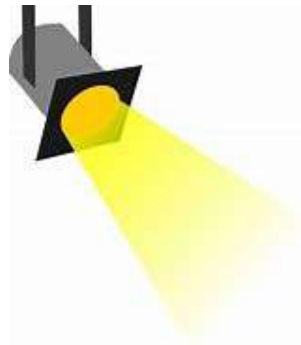


MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

KATE LANGNER



I have been a Master Gardener Volunteer for close to 20 years, but a hands-on gardener all of my life. My gardening experience started at an extremely early age because my parents owned and operated a second generation greenhouse in northern Wisconsin. My grandfather learned his greenhouse skills as a gardener in Krakow, Poland, and passed them on to my dad. Although I didn't realize it at the time, my parents' small attempt to earn extra income gave me many life skills that have carried me through the years. Each spring Dad would prepare the flats of soil under the warmth of the early February sun coming through the greenhouse windows. His concoction of Vermiculite, sand, compost, and soil in a "special recipe" would nurture the small seedlings once they sprouted. He'd carefully tamp and level the soil in these "flats" (boxes of the mix, approximately 3" deep x 2' wide x 3' long) until all the lumps were gone, explaining that a level surface would prevent puddling of water and minimize the chances of the seedlings "dampening off". Once the seeds were sown (petunia seeds were the hardest to sprout because they were so small to handle and fragile until they developed their second set of leaves), the flats of seeds would be carried to a propagating bed, which was situated above a hand made stove kept at just the right temperature to encourage sprouting. Too much heat from the wood stove and the seeds would roast or dry out – too little and they would mold. Once the seedlings had their second leaves, I'd learn how to transplant them into more flats of soil, marked off in a grid-work pattern so we would always know how many plants were in a flat, and we could gauge their survival rate. Careful records were kept of each variety of seed, the seed source (back then, almost everything came from Old's Seed Company because theirs was "the best"), planting date, germination rate, transplanting date, and date we transferred the flats to the hardening off area in outside beds with large covering windows. This process was repeated for all the flowers and vegetables we grew to sell to the public in late May or early June. People would come from miles around to purchase my parents' plants, often telling us that they remembered buying plants from my grandfather on that same homestead. My dad's methods were a carryover of what he learned from his father, and there was little in the arena of new methods. Today, we know so much more about propagation and survival rates, but back then there were few chemicals or anti-dotes for plant failure. You just tried a different method next year, based on the journal you kept, showing successes and failures. Isn't this what we do now if we are intent on improving our outcome?



So what does all of this reminiscing have to do with modern day gardening? It brings to mind the many things we can teach our children, grandchildren, or anyone else who comes into our lives. I did not realize as a child growing up in a greenhouse environment that my parents were giving me life skills, the ability to meet people at an early age, a strong tie with the earth and amazement at the

miracle of life sprouting from a small seed, carefully tended and nurtured. This connection with nature has followed me all through my life – I've always had a garden, even if only a small plot.

Now that I am retired and my time is more my own, I enjoy being able to plant more vegetables than I need and sharing them with the local food pantry. Each spring I start digging around in the soil, searching for the first harbinger of the season. But my real passion is the prairie/native area on our land outside of Appleton. What started out as a four acre plot of natives has now grown into more than 30 acres! That deep connection with the earth and it's ever changing palette is evident as the seasons move from spring to fall to winter. The wildlife that frequents this area is a joy to watch each season. Students from UW-Madison have come to do species counts and research. This native area has given me the opportunity to be an instructor for the Level I classes and each year we welcome the new students to our prairie to see for themselves what can be accomplished from a little seed. This "little seed" pun is intended, because we all have the opportunity in our lives to plant a little seed in someone who crosses our path, never knowing the profound affect we might achieve.

Come experience our prairie area in August of this year when we host the monthly meeting. Perhaps we can plant a little seed in your life and then you can pass it on to someone else.