



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Mary Lou Senf Class of 2016



My interest in gardening came at a very young age as I followed my father around as he planted, hoed, weeded and harvested produce from the large vegetable garden that he maintained. We grew and preserved our own food--it was a way of life. I lived in a rural area of Muskegon County and much of that area was situated over the sand dunes of the western coastline of Lower Michigan. My family's home sat on a three-acre parcel of land surrounded by the many cultivated blueberry fields of the farms in that area. My first gardening experiences were in this sandy, acidic soil.

The garden soil in my Wisconsin yard contains more clay than that sandy, acidic soil I was accustomed to in Michigan. It does seem nice not having to add lime all the time to raise the pH for growing vegetables. But, now I have to contend with the gravelly soil left from the glacial action of years ago. Since gravelly soil makes for difficult hand gardening, my husband and I brought in soil and made several raised garden beds. Regardless of the different soil types, I find being outdoors working in the soil, planting, harvesting along with canning and freezing of the harvest to be very enjoyable and rewardable. I am sure this stems from my family's way of life and my childhood memories of shadowing my father and learning his gardening practices.

I took the Master Gardener Level 1 class in 2016 after I retired. The class provided me with a much better understanding of the science of gardening. A few years ago my husband and I re-designed our garden area and made a no-till garden plot. At first it was a huge undertaking, but now it has reduced the amount of weeding and watering time required. The information I gained from the Level 1 class

has helped to improve my no-till garden practices giving me a better understanding and a more intentional approach to sustainable garden practices.

Because of my interest in composting and soils, I enrolled in the 2017 Master Gardener Level 2: Composting and Soils on-line class. I found it to be an excellent course providing more in-depth information on composting and soils. Even though I have practiced composting over the years, I learned how to adjust some of my composting techniques and am anxious to see the improved results.

I became interested in vermiculture, and a few years ago purchased a ready-made worm house along with 2,000 Red Wigglers. I keep this worm tower on the floor in my kitchen where it is close to the food source and convenient to maintain. So far, after five years, all has been going well and I have successfully harvested several buckets of worm castings for the garden. I have learned from experience the food scraps the worms like best and the ones to avoid plus have figured out a way to keep the worms moist and with a sufficient food supply while being gone for extended periods of time. Now that the kids are gone and the dog has died, worms are an easy replacement! No noise, no odor, low maintenance and all the benefits of the worm castings. Also, it gives my husband the opportunity to tell people that his wife has worms; such a nice topic of conversation, maybe or maybe NOT??